MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY

Magazine
Issue 9
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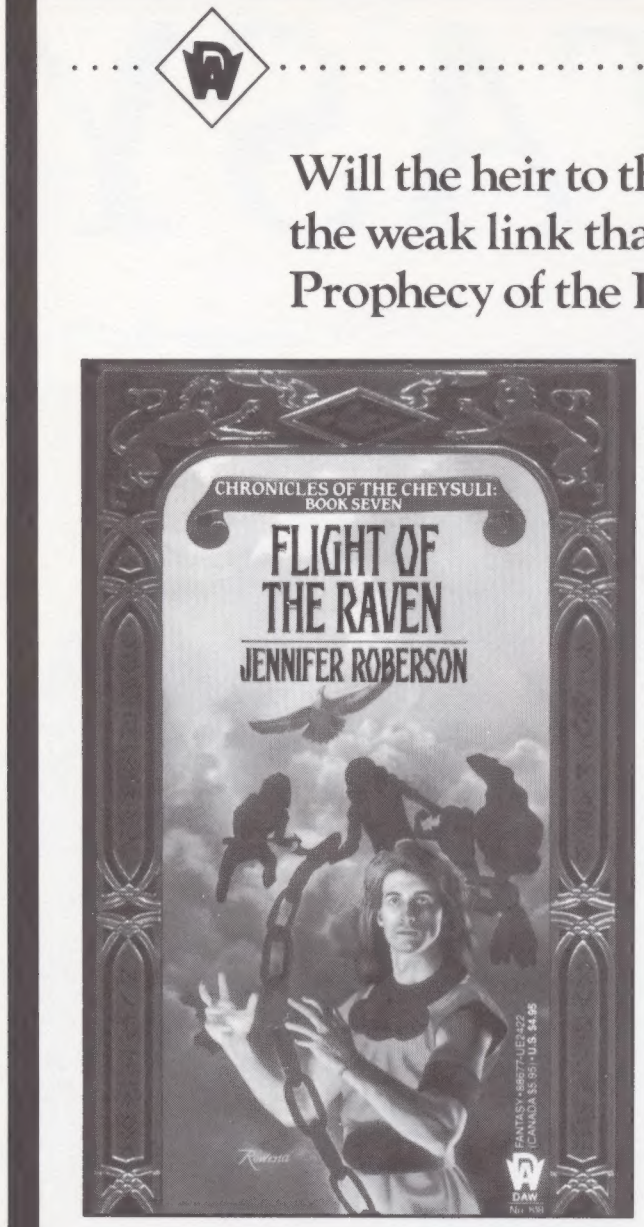
Diana L. Paxson
Mercedes Lackey

George Scithers
Darrell Schweitzer

SPECIAL SHORT-SHORT ISSUE



Will the heir to the Lion Throne prove the weak link that destroys the age-old Prophecy of the First born?

Chronicles of the Cheysuli: Book Seven

FLIGHT OF THE RAVEN

Jennifer Roberson

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Marion Zimmer Bradley
Jan Burke
EDITORS & PUBLISHERS

Valued Assistants
David Bradley
Bobbe Lee

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MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY

Magazine

EDITORIAL

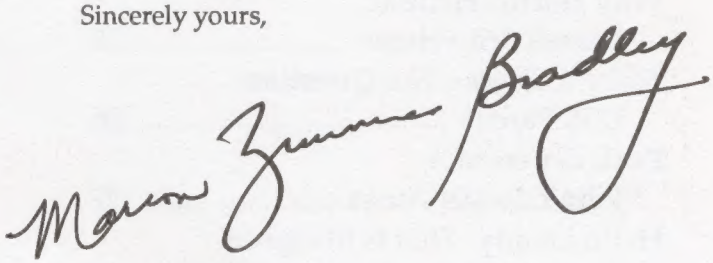
This is the first issue I am not recommending you read cover to cover. Reading too many short-short stories at once tends to be like eating too much popcorn. With results you can imagine. Take these stories one or two at a time, chew and digest well. In spite of all this the short-short story is the perfect medium for Science-fiction, Fantasy, or Horror. The reason is that these are stories of pure ideas. I still feel and feel very strongly that the elements of good stories must be followed. Every story needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. The one thing I refused in this issue was the kind of story known as a "Feghoot". It got its name from *The Adventures of Ferdinand Feghoot* by "Grendel Briarton" (whose true identity was Reginald Bretnor). The feghoot is a story, usually very short, which is a total set-up for a bad pun. The common lines are about leaving no tern unstoned, or no stern untoned. I have never made any secret that feghoots are my pet abomination.

I think we have presented excellent examples of every type; Fantasy, Science-fiction, and Horror. We have three examples of longer stories -- one of each kind which present the sort of thing we really like. We're especially proud of the C. L. Moore-like story by Diana Paxson, which is the kind of Science-fiction story we are particularly fond of. As I've said before (and will probably say again), reading for an issue like this is like pearl diving -- most of the time all you get is a wet, smelly oyster that isn't even good to eat. It's only the hundredth time you get the pearl. The stories that appeal to me are not necessarily the stories that will appeal to you. Even Jan and I did not agree on the best stories in this issue: quite the reverse. But we think that everyone will find some different stories of particular interests.

You may have noticed– this issue is very dense, very text oriented. That's partly because I like it that way. I wish we could have used twice as many stories, but type face is notoriously inelastic. For every page of art we had to subtract a story - and for this short-short issue we were committed to printing as many stories as we could. Even so, we're holding over about 3 very good ones for next issue – something to look forward to.

For once we have not arranged this issue to be read in any special order. So now it's time to start the sampling process– just skip around and sample the stories as they appeal to you.

Sincerely yours,



MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

Fantasy Magazine

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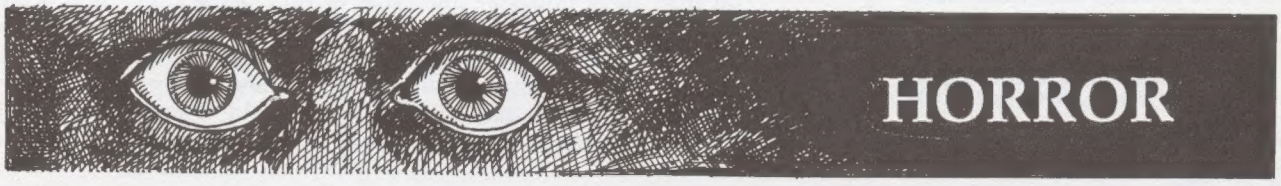

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The Dancer of Chimaera

Diana L. Paxson

They called her Mariposa and she danced in a tavern on Chimaera Station. She was scarcely a woman yet, but she was female enough for the men who did their drinking at the High Orbit. They were Space Forcers on shore leave mostly, or techs from the defense project that was the main reason the Station was there. In the evenings they drank, and watched Mariposa, and tried to forget the war.

Johnny Yaleran wavered in the doorway. The heat of the tavern reminded him of the generator room of the *Glinka* , though the sour smell of spilled beer and the mixed reeks of tobacco and weed were richer than the high ozone air he'd been breathing since he left home. He bent forward, peering through the gloom.

A bunch of big techs from the repair docks heading for the door were enough to make up his mind for him. They drew him in their wake towards the bar. Even then he might have retreated, but there was an empty place, and he slid into it, trying to look as if he belonged there. Beyond the bar was a small bare stage and a musician's stand. But the synthetor's lights were dead and canned music strove unsuccessfully with the patrons' din.

The man in the stained coveralls on the next perch slurped noisily at his drink and set it down, turning to the thin fellow beside him.

"Well, I say we've nothin' to worry about — " Johnny heard him snort. "The Shifters will never get this far, and if they do, we'll implode 'em." He drank again and wiped his mouth with a beefy hand.

"Think so? They've taken the Iberian system, and Lutece, Lord knows how. The project's a prime target..." The thin man stopped, looking at Johnny.

There was a loud cough and Johnny flushed, realizing that the barman was waiting, order disk in hand. There was a list on the wall before him, and Johnny chose at random.

"...one double Red, straight," the barman repeated, punching the order and waiting impassively while Johnny fumbled in his pouch for his credit chip.

"Thank you," Johnny said. The man smiled automatically and went off.

"You new here?" the big man asked, and Johnny nodded. "Thought so — " he grinned suddenly and extended a hand. "I'm Hank Mendos, 'ponics Tech, and this here's my buddy Duprey."

Johnny introduced himself and the thin man beside Mendos nodded.

"*Glinka* , you say? She hasn't seen combat yet, has she?"

"Neither have I," Johnny confessed. "I signed on when she was commissioned on Soyuz."

The barman set a glass of crimson liquid before him. Johnny picked it up, aware of their eyes upon him, but the fluid slid easily down his throat. As he took a second sip, the first exploded in his belly. Their expressions had warned him, but he was still gasping a few moments later when the nova inside him began to die down. Carefully, he drank again.

Duprey smiled with approval — or perhaps it was amusement.

"I wish you luck. Of course the Shifters' weapons are no match for ours — not their physical weapons, anyhow - " He leaned forward, lowering his voice so that Johnny had to strain to hear. "I'm in Communications, and I've heard the log of the *Tonnerre*."

Johnny stared, remembering the hulk whose orbit they had crossed on their way in. Duprey went on.

"They had picked up a bunch of refugees, and they were all having a concert to cheer them up, see, when it began. There's not much on the disc — just ramblings about the music, and then the sound of the explosion when they hit the asteroid." Duprey sighed.

"What was the music like?" Johnny asked.

"There was no music on the discs," said Duprey. "No music at all — "

"You think one of them refugees was a Shifter?" said Mendos.

"Must have been...they must have forgotten to run the test when they took them on."

Johnny shivered, but Mendos was looking past him to the stage. "Well, now, I guess it's time for the show!" He grinned.

The lights of the synthetor were beginning to glow. The operator, only one in a place like this, hunched over the control board, adjusting the dials. Beside him a sleepy-eyed drummer stroked the plastic of his drumhead. From the signs outside, Johnny gathered they were very proud of having a real drum.

The noise diminished slightly and the synthetor chimed once, projecting a pink glow onto the stage. A fat man in a stained purple tunic waved his arms for silence.

"And now — we bring you the star of the Galaxy — La Mariposa!"

The light intensified from pink to purple, then back to red as the drummer took up a slow beat. Johnny leaned forward as the screen shimmered and a girl slipped through it onto the stage.

"She ain't much," said Mendos, "but it don't seem anyone else wants to come out here so close to the war, and she's kinda cute, after all."

For a moment the girl hesitated, flinching as all the male eyes focused upon her face. The drum boomed again and she stepped forward, stretching out her arms so that the flashers on her cloak glittered red. The synthetor began to burble out a tune and she waved her arms aimlessly, swaying back and forth in time to the music.

"You've left me all alone, what can I do? There's no one in the galaxy like you..." she sang in a thin sweet voice, still swaying. Johnny recognized the song. It had been popular just before he left home.

The lights changed from red to yellow, to green and blue, while the predicable words trudged on. "...unless you give me all your love I'll die!" She let her arms drop to her sides.

"Come on, honey, take it off — that's a girl!" came a shout from the back of the room. The drum rolled demandingly.

The girl stretched her colored lips in a smile and her hands moved to the fastenings at the neck of her cloak. Slowly she undid them. The cloth slithered to the floor and she kicked it aside. Her skinny body was covered mainly by body film, red on one side, silver on the other, with interlocking spirals where the two colors joined.

Johnny took an involuntary swallow of his drink. They didn't have anything like this on Soyuz.

Mariposa walked around the stage, throwing her hips sharply from side to side so that the orfa feathers on her girdle fluttered, hip bones alternately defined under the colored skin. Her little breasts bobbled and the tiny stars glued to them winked at Johnny as she turned.

The barman was asking if he wanted another drink. Johnny pulled out his credit slip without taking his eyes from the stage. The drummer had stepped up the beat. The dancer began to stamp and fling her arms about, concluding with a backbend that threw all her ribs into relief.

The music slowed. Johnny took his new drink, swallowed part of it, and set the bulb down. The girl straightened and struck a stylized pose. Johnny noted with strange clarity that some of her hair had escaped from its topknot and clung damply to her neck. She made a vague gesture with her slender hands and quavered out another verse of her song.

"Poor kid — she don't hardly know what it's all about, does she?" said Mendos. "Now I remember the girls on Bagatelle — you ever go to Madam Sue's, Duprey? There was one bitty there who had breasts like..." he searched for words and gave up with a lush movement of his hands.

Duprey shook his head, sighing. "No...but I knew a little girl on Sianna once. She had hair like black silk that reached to her knees..." He broke off, staring into shadow, remembering.

Johnny reached out for the girl's hand as they began to walk. Their footsteps echoed on the permacrete of the pedway, almost deserted at this hour. They turned a corner and the pink blaze of the High Orbit's entrance was hidden. Mariposa breathed deeply.

"Thank you for coming with me, Johnny."

He squeezed her hand, still too astonished at the privilege to reply. For the past month, he had been off-duty two nights a week, and he had spent every one of them at the High Orbit, watching Mariposa dance. It had taken a week for him to get up the courage to speak to her, two weeks more before she would let him buy her a drink when the show was done. And tonight she had asked him if he would like to walk her home.

He knew that Mendos and Duprey thought his passion funny, knew that not a man on the Station would have hurt Mariposa, but he could not help feeling the way he had when he stood watch over the generators of the *Glinka* alone for the first time. He breathed a little faster and pressed her hand again.

"It is good to be quiet at last," she said. "I wish I could see the stars."

They looked up at the anonymous dusk of the Station's dome.

"I'd like to show them to you," he said. "In deep space the sky's pure carbon black, and the stars burn steady and bright as glowflies." He paused, trying to find words for the glory. "Could you see the stars from your home planet?"

"I — don't know," she replied. "I remember being on ships, and on other Stations under domes, but I think I must have left home when I was very young...I don't remember it at all."

Johnny felt an immediate protective surge and drew her arm within his. "When the war is over I'll show you all the worlds. There are fields of multi-colored grasses at home. You run through them and the wind cools your face with the scent of flowers."

"It would be good to run free and see the sky," she said wistfully. "Since you've been here, have you been outside?"

"No," he replied. "I've seen pictures. It doesn't look like a bad world — a little hot maybe. Too bad there's not enough oxygen in the air for men to breathe."

"I think they mean to terraform it, after the war."

"Well, that can't be long now," he said confidently. "It's been going badly lately, I know — the Shifters are in the next system now. But the Project is almost complete. Duprey says the Mindshield they've installed will stop the psychbending the Shifters have been using to get through. Soon all our ships will have it too."

She stopped, facing him. Johnny realized with a shock that they had reached the end of the residence complex where the few nonmilitary personnel on the Station lived. He paused in front of the entry, fighting a shiver of impending loss.

"Are you cold?" she asked softly.

"Cold? No — "

"You sure? You don't look well. Do you want to come up with me? I can fix you some stimo..."

He stared at her.

"It's not much of a place, I guess — " she went on. "Not on what the bar pays me. But I brew stimo as well as any autosnacky!"

"Oh! Of course — sure, Mariposa, I'd be honored to come in!"

She was right. It was not much of a place — a room about as big as his cubby on the *Glinka*, with walls the original no-glare green and fold-down furniture. There was one window. Only a poster advertising Mariposa stuck to the wall and some clothing thrown over a chair marked it as her room. Johnny looked about him, his gaze sliding quickly past the curtain that gave nominal privacy to the bedcorner, and came to rest on the girl. She smiled and turned to pull down the kitchen controls.

He lifted the clothes from the chair and sat down, searching for something to say. "Mariposa, do you like it here?" he got out at last. "I mean, are the people nice to you?"

"Oh yes — a Station isn't the prettiest place in the universe, but everyone's polite."

He looked at her thin shoulders and the defenseless line of her back.

"All the men?" he asked, his voice hoarse suddenly.

"Why would they bother me?" she said quietly, stirring the brew.

"But you're — a dancer — " the words burst out of him.

"And that's all I am," she flared. "Look at me. I'm not much temptation even on stage with all my fittings on, and without them —" she thrust the bulb into his hands and started to turn away.

He held it without drinking, looking at her. "Mariposa, I think you're beautiful..."

Something flickered behind her eyes. "I'm not...Johnny, you mustn't say that!"

"But lots of men — " he began, and then, when she began to shake her head, felt the betraying blush begin and fade and didn't care. "You mean that no one — that you haven't ever — "

She hugged herself, swaying. Johnny got up and stepped towards her, realized that he was still holding the stimo bulb, and set it down.

"Mariposa," he said. I"m sorry, I didn't mean..." She didn't seem to have heard him. Moving with an urgency beyond his analysis, he took her in his arms.

She stood rigid in his embrace, still shaking. But she relaxed suddenly when his mouth touched hers. It was a long

kiss, if a little clumsy, and when he released her at last, her eyes had gone unfocused and huge in her pale face.

"What is it?" she asked tonelessly. "What is happening — oh, Johnny," she cried, seeing him at last. "Let me go! I love you — please go!"

He held her, dismay warring with an exaltation that burned upwards from his belly to his brain. She had said, "I love you..."

The girl quivered suddenly, then sighed. Her eyes were glittering; she watched him with a look he had never seen before. Alarm pulsed along his nerves, but even as he started to release her, she gripped his arms and pulled his head down to hers. His body jerked as their lips touched once more.

Mariposa held him now. Her body was hard, her scent sharp and sweet. He wondered vaguely how she had gotten a perfume like the flowers of the faranelle trees at home. Then he stopped thinking at all.

Their clothing was stripped off and they stumbled towards the bed. The current was passing through him more violently now but he could not break away. As they struggled on the bed, his flesh was melded to hers and their bodies convulsed as one. But it was Mariposa who screamed as in a flash of ecstasy his body went beyond his control entirely and he was consumed.

Above their heads, the little window brightened as the terrible light of Chimaera's dawn filtered through the Dome.

The light in the window had flared and faded once more to dusk when Mariposa rose. Her hair had come undone. She shook it back over her shoulders and then stretched lazily, arching her body in content. She stepped over to the fresher, rotated luxuriously under its needling spray. After a few moments she stepped out, slipped past the motionless body on the bed, and began, with full, sensuous strokes, to brush out her hair.

It was not until she had finished dressing and had picked up her cloak to go out that she glanced at the figure on the bed, a last faint sadness momentarily humanizing her face.

"Have you seen Johnny tonight?" Duprey gestured towards the empty seat beside Mendos as he sat down.

"No, but he'll be here — he never misses Mariposa's show."

"It's getting late..."

Mendos, who was on his third drink already, shook his head. "Don't worry, maybe he's backstage with her now..."

Both men laughed, and Duprey ordered a drink.

"That's right, Duprey — drink up! You can afford to, now the Shield's up!"

Duprey grunted and picked up the bulb, glaring at a technician who had started to take the empty chair.

The manager got up to make his announcement and the noise level sank to its usual dull roar. The synthetor warbled out the introductory theme. There was a shadow behind the screen.

"Well, here's Mariposa — " said Mendos. "Musta been in a hurry — no color on her face. Wonder if she's got her costume on?" He snickered happily.

Mariposa stepped over to the musicians, her robe flowing around her. As she spoke to them, the music faded and for a moment, the drumbeat faltered. The manager glared, but in a few beats they had recovered, and the drum boomed, commanding all eyes to the stage. The synthetor sang out a series of high notes, monotonous and pure. The drum pounded again and Mariposa whirled, cloak flaring around her like a red nebula. Then, with a flash, it was off.

Mariposa danced.

Her pale body was washed by the changing lights. Her eyes glittered. Her slender feet stamped out an echo to the rhythm of the drum.

"What's come over the girl? Never saw her move that way — " Mendos blinked as if he were having trouble focusing.

Mariposa swayed with the music, her movements sending adrenalin sparking through the bodies of those who watched her, the flutter of her fingers compelling their attention. She circled in front of the musicians; the synthetor faded and she began to sing.

"I am the sweet surge of the tide...I can release the love inside — "was what Duprey heard, and his bulb rolled unheeded from his hand. "Follow me, follow, out from the shallows, into the depths of the sea..."

Mendos leaned forward, clutching at the edge of the bar.

"I am the scent that stirs the night, I offer measureless delights! Follow me, follow, all here is hollow, and in me ecstasy!"

The drum beat faster now. Mariposa leaped down from the stage and moved among the men. Each one felt the touch of her fingers on his heart, heard her singing to him alone, and they circled her like new-formed planets around a sun.

"Sima..." breathed Duprey, stumbling towards her.

"No — it's Honey, my own Honey — lookit those bulbs, just like I told you!" Mendos cried.

Mariposa drifted towards the door, singing. She sang the men out into the street and towards the main pedway. The synthetor whispered to silence, but the drummer slipped the strap over his head and continued to play, and his beat pulsed through the artificial air. Mariposa's singing rode that pulse to echo from the walls of the buildings and reflect from the ceiling of the Dome.

The Station was not very large. It was not long before the strange procession had circled it, and wherever it passed, men came to their doors, and when they had opened, they saw Mariposa dance, and heard her sing, and when they had seen and heard, they followed her.

They came at last to the door that led Outside.

"I am your dream and your desire...
I am the burning of love's fire...
Follow me, follow, out of the window,
and we shall be free!
I feed your hunger, I bring you home
No more to wander, no more to
roam...
Follow me, follow, into tomorrow,
oh, follow me..."

It took a few moments for the man who knew how to work the handles to make his way through the crowd to the door, and a little longer for another, who had set the pattern of switches that would make them release, to reach the controls. But Mariposa sang on.

She danced need for her into their blood, she sang her image into their brains. She was golden-haired with breasts like Perelan honey melons...she was doll-slim, veiled by silken black hair...or tall and redheaded...dark-skinned with eyes like coals...petite... luscious...every man's desire.

The door swung open, and one by one they went through. Their eyes focused on the dancer before them; they heard her song. They pursued her even as they fell on the burning sand Outside, clutching at throats that choked on the atmosphere that was only a little wrong for men. They embraced her image as they died.

The little window in Mariposa's room grew bright as day rose on Chimaera once more. It gilded the scattered clothing and the ruined bed, and illuminated the face of the man who lay there, still set in the smile of one who had been possessed by his desire.

Mariposa quietly closed the door and walked back through the empty ways until she reached Station Control. She passed through its corridors, ignoring the banks of machines with their futilely flashing lights, until she came at last to the one machine that mattered and touched its controls to impotence. Then she moved onward to the viewroom where she could see the Shifter ships drifting silently down.

They called her Mariposa, and she had danced for the men of Chimaera, but she was not a woman...she was not a woman at all. ❧

An Interview with

George Scithers

by Darrell Schweitzer

George Scithers is a retired Army officer and engineer, the founding editor of *Issac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* , which he edited until 1982, the former editor of *Amazing Stories* (1982-1986), and the winner of four Hugo Awards for editing. He is presently co-editor and co-publisher of *Weird Tales®* magazine. With John M. Ford and Darrell Schweitzer he wrote a handbook for beginning writers, *On Writing Science Fiction: The Editors Strike Back* (1981), and with Darrell Schweitzer he has edited two anthologies of somewhat boozy stories (remarkable since neither editor drinks), *Tales from the Spaceport Bar* and *Another Round at the Spaceport Bar* (Avon).

Q: *Weird Tales®* seems to be the antithesis of all that you've been involved in previously. So, would you tell the readers how you came to this juncture?

Scithers: It's probably all Darrell's fault. Actually, it's all John Betancourt's fault. The title *Weird Tales®* is an extremely strong one. It has a reputation attached to it, a lot of mystique attached to it; and it represented a kind of fiction which is being widely written but which has relatively little full, professional outlet at this time.

Q: You've mostly edited science fiction throughout your career. So, do you think you have any feel for the Weird Tales sort of story, which, after all, virtually precludes the kind of story you published in *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*?

Scithers: Very bluntly, I don't have too much of a feel for this kind of fiction. I know what works as fiction in a broad and general sense, but what works as horror, I'm not a terribly good expert at.

Q: Would you rather be editing science fiction?

Scithers I'd rather be editing *Planet Stories.*

Q: Would you like to comment on the possibility that you will be editing Planet Stories one day.

Scithers Admittedly it would be more fun to edit *Flabbergasting Sword* and *Planet Stories.* Not right now. We've got to get *Weird Tales®* into a more secure financial condition before we can undertake another magazine.

Q: So, it's been science fiction all along, as your first love. How then did you become interested in SF?

Scithers I was led astray by a room-mate at a boarding school back in 1947, in Texas. The room-mate has since proved his evil intent by going into law, specializing in oil properties. From there it was reading an awful lot of *Astounding Science Fiction*, and then in 1953 or so, joining the Elves, Gnomes, and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society; and then in 1954 attending the World Science Fiction Convention in San Francisco. In 1959 I started publishing an amateur magazine called *Amra*, essentially about Conan the Cimmerian and stories like his. By 1963 I had descended to the point of becoming chairman of a World Science Fiction Convention. Then, by 1976 I was invited to be the editor of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine.* I had met Isaac himself on our way back from a convention in Detroit many years before. We were both headed toward Boston and we were both sensible enough to ride the train. Anyway, I was in a position to take what amounted to a part-time job with a part-time salary, somewhat of a speculative venture; and the magazine went rather rapidly from quarterly to bi-monthly, then to monthly, and has been a considerable success. There was a parting of the ways some years later between myself and the publisher of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction* Magazine, and I was at liberty for a few months until Gary Gygax and I decided that it would be nice if he bought *Amazing Stories* and I became its editor. So he persuaded the rest of the Board of Directors of TSR, Inc., the Dungeons and Dragons people, to buy *Amazing* and make me editor, and I was happily editing *Amazing Stories* for a few years. Then a restructuring at TSR had me leaving in a very, very amicable parting, and after a year of being bored out of my skull, John Betancourt and Darrell Schweitzer suggested that we revive *Weird Tales®*. So, as you see, it's all their fault.

Q: Considering that the first magazine you started was *Amra*, devoted to Robert E. Howard and Conan, there must have been some interest in the *Weird Tales®* sort of story all along.

Scithers In the sword-and-sorcery type of story, yes. I think my basic imprinting was more on the adventuresome, Edgar Rice Burroughs than anything else, and science fiction sort of fitted into that. But the straight stuff, the real sword-and-planet story, I suspect is my greatest weakness.

Q: Would you describe what you mean by "sword and planet," since that term is not used much anymore.

Scithers Sword-and-planet, rocket-and-raygun—it's sword and sorcery with a veneer of science fiction draped over the more sorcerous parts to add a ton of verisimilitude to an otherwise . . . well, you know the quote.

Q: Do you think that the sword-and-planet story of the Edgar Rice Burroughs manner is still a viable form?

Scithers: Probably not, but I like it anyway.

Q: I wonder if the problem isn't simply that it is no longer believable that anyone will explore alien planets in a loincloth with sword in hand.

Scithers It's believable if you make it believable. You have to set up the planet with circumstances that a sword is appropriate, and if a sword doesn't work, use a light-saber.

Q: In other words, twisting the requirements of the story to meet a prefabricated image.

Scithers Sword-and-planet is essentially an unreal, medieval adventure story set in the future with a dollop of plausibility painted onto it. Fritz Leiber's term for the subgenre is "rocket and raygun" rather than "sword and planet," but it is essentially adolescent-male combat fantasies.

Q: Since sword-and-planet is essentially a hybrid

between science fiction and fantasy, what do you see as the difference in appeal between the two forms?

Scithers: There are some readers who like to have a veneer of extreme plausibility, even if it's done with smoke and mirrors. They will read science fiction and have nothing to do with fantasy, because science fiction can pretend that the events in the story might happen, whereas fantasy usually doesn't. Other than that, I see the distinction between them as being rather artificial. Ed Ferman, with *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, publishes for a joint audience, as does David Publications with *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, which has a heavy dose of fantasy in it now. And the late, lamented Asimov's *SF Adventure Magazine* was quite overtly fantasy in a third to a half of the stories.

Q: Today, in the paperback market especially, there seems to be a greater division between science fiction and fantasy—and their readerships—than ever before. So, do you think the mix is still possible?

Scithers : I think the mix is still possible. I think the division between the two categories is an accident; far more science fiction and fantasy is being published than any reader can keep up with. Strongly dividing them into two castes means that a reader can pick whichever type he or she is a little more comfortable with, instead of trying to cope with selecting from a much broader bookshelf.

Q: When you started reading, you were reading *Astounding*, which is what the hard-science readers of the time would have considered to be the real stuff. It wouldn't have had much similarity to fantasy at all. Therefore it must have an appeal all its own.

Scithers : Yes, but remember that the hard science fiction of the time included E.E. Smith's Lensmen, which included such patently ridiculous gimmicks as an intertialess drive in which everybody inside the vessel had no inertia whatsoever. This doesn't bear much thinking without coming apart. In essence, the science fiction of the time had some pretty wild impossibilities built into it.

Q: I think the real distinction is that, no matter how wild it may be, science fiction is pretending to be part of the natural universe, and it's pretending that the characters, through the use of the scientific method, are able to understand the wonders that are going on. This is something that fantasy doesn't do.

Scithers : Some fantasy, particularly that which John W. Campbell favored in his magazine *Unknown* , did just that. It asumed that magic was susceptible to all the rigors of the scientific method. Interesting thought: . . . is it possible to have a system of magic which is simply not susceptible to any theory-experiment-verification-retheorize-reexperiment cycle, which is called the scientific method?

Q : I think that any mystic would tell you Yes , which is one of the ways a contemporary mystic can evade the need for proof. I would make the distinction between science fiction and not-science-fiction as the presence or absence of a true supernatural element.

Scithers : Remember that the mystics that we deal with are people who are trying to cope with a system of belief which does not work. If magic really worked, it would be practiced in an entirely different manner, I think.

Q : I am reminded of a lovely line from James Morrow's *Only Begotten Daughter* , which said (I paraphrase) that most people would prefer to live a lie than merely admire the truth. He was referring to science, which most people cannot participate in, whereas most people can at least convince themselves that they are participating in, say, astrology.

Scithers : That's because they don't know what science is. The matter of figuring out that the reason that the toilet won't stop gurgling is because that rod over there is bent too far, and then bending the rod back a little bit and then running the toilet and seeing if it will stop gurgling, and then trying something else, and trying something else -- this is the scientific method and anybody with a flush-toilet can practice it.

Q : Let's talk about John W. Campbell, Jr. for a minute. He was such an important figure as an editor of *Astounding* from 1938 to 1971 that he must have entered into the consciousness of every science ficton editor to come after him. How well did you know him and what do you think were his real strengths?

Scithers : I met him in passing at several conventions. I visited his home in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, I believe twice during his lifetime, and once after his death. A remarkable presence. He was strongly opinionated, and yet I think he was always a step ahead of the people who thought they had figured him out. I remember a comment by the late Randall Garrett, who said he thought he had fooled John Campbell with a story written under a pseudonym and submitted by an agent, but he was never sure and Campbell wouldn't say and Randall never dared ask, for fear of giving away the whole thing. I think of Campbell as the man who suddenly managed to outnumber a whole panel of critics at a science fiction convention, at the moment when Ted Cogswell, one of the critics on the panel, found himself asked to prove the existence of China, right there, on that platform.

Q : I've heard it said that Campbell's main method of discourse was starting arguments with people in order to come to a fruitful result. Was this your experience?

Scithers : No. He tossed out ideas to see what happened in this particular case. Remember that I wasn't one of his writers. I was somebody who knew somebody who was a friend of his, but I was not really one of his writers. But his ideas always sounded convincing as he said them. I remember his remark that *Pravda* doesn't mean "truth"; it means "the word". I don't know if this is so or not, but he said it very convincingly. He commented that in English, all the really top-notch writers with trivial exceptions --- trivial in number not in quality -- are men, whereas in Japanese it's exactly the opposite. He said it very convincingly. I don't know to what extent this is true. But it certainly sounded believable at the time.

Q : He seems to be most remembered for his ability to interact with and shape the output of his writers in a way that no editor since has successfully done. Normally when a magazine editor today tries to tell a bunch of writers to write this, or to shape the way their careers are going, they'll get resistance or no response, or the writer will go elsewhere.

Scithers : Suddenly I suspect that one of Campbell's greatest achievements was getting enough money out of the publisher to pay writers enough money to make them really turn in good stories, and to thereby get a magazine whose circulation was large enough to make the project financially worthwhile for the publisher. In other words, when we consider how Campbell tended to dominate his writers, consider how well he must have been able to dominate the people who supposed to be in charge of him.

Q : I think there may also be a historic accident here. You'll notice that the period of his greatest dominance, circa 1938-1950, when science fiction was largely what John Campbell said science fiction was, was also a period in which magazines were everything . There was no book market. Campbell was in a monopoly position, controlling the

absolute center of the field, the top magazine, *Astounding* ; but he was no longer able to do this in the 1960s, when there were many other worthy magazines, and the majority of the field had shifted into book-publishing anyway. In 1941, if you wanted to write challenging science fiction for adults, you had to write for John Campbell or forget it. In 1971, this was no longer true.

Scithers : This is not entirely so. Throughout the '40s there were a number of science-fiction markets, but Campbell was the one who had the most money to give away and Campbell was the one who pulled down the big circulation as a result. I suspect that he persuaded his publisher to support him and the magazine in a way that the magazine made so much money that it dominated the field financially. It continued to dominate the field financially all the way up to the time when Isaac Asimov's magazine started.

Q : A couple of points. I believe the magazine which actually dominated the field financially in the '40s was *Amazing*. It certainly paid as much and had a higher circulation than *Astounding*. But it consisted of brainless, formula juvenile adventures, so a writer like Heinlein or Asimov would really have very little to do there. And, while *Analog* dominated the magazine field until the mid-1970s, the magazine field had by then become a much less significant portion of science fiction as a whole. It was quite possible for a major writer to emerge --- C. J. Cherryh for example --- with virtually no involvement in magazines at all.

Scithers : Okay. *Galaxy* magazine did very well in circulation and I suspect approached or exceeded *Astounding* at various times, but it didn't have the financial stability, and, I suspect, the financial return, that *Analog* turned in year after year to a very competent publisher. Remember that Campbell and his magazine continued in existence while all around it all the pulp magazines went down the drain.

Q : I think the big bucks in science fiction nowadays is the five-million-dollar Heinlein-type book, not anything anybody does in a magazine.

Scithers : That's true. But in Campbell's time he was a dominant factor in the magazine field, and *Astounding/Analog* were the real money-makers in the magazine field. I suspect that *Analog* never lost money.

Q : I have a theory that because the magazine in science fiction is such a small part of the field today, and cannot possibly compete financially with the novel field, no magazine editor has the economic clout to direct his writers the way Campbell did.

Scithers : I would guess that considering the circulation of *Omni* , this is still possible. It's not happening with *Omni*, for reasons I do not understand because I've never been close to its operation. But if a magazine containing a significant amount of science fiction can have the kind of circulation that *Omni* has, it's not happening. But perhaps it could.

Q : To get back to science fiction, rather than the publishing thereof, what do you look for in a science fiction story?

Scithers : In a science fiction story ---No, this is more important than the difference between fantasy and science fiction. I enjoy a certain number of fluffy, fun stories, which my interlocutor feels are a hissing and an abomination, because they don't tell how miserable and awful the world really is --- he's looking glum; he's going to disagree with me. In science fiction I would look for stories where the writer has a clear understanding of what point-of-view is and uses it in a way which is effective. I would like to see stories which do not require the rejection Campbell gave to so many stories, "You've stated the problem --- now solve it."

Q : Surely the definition of "solve it" can vary. No, I would not insist that all stories be gloomy affairs in which the entire cast perishes in miserable futility --- and you must realize that the majority of my admittedly very small science-fiction output is comedy --- but don't you think this requirement leads to pat answers, the kind of story in which the young hero in the future society performs one symbolic act and five hundred years of historical development come down like a house of cards?

Scithers : I am thinking rather that people don't pick up a science fiction magazine to be reminded of the frustrations of day-to-day life.

Q : Even with Campbell there was an understanding that we could solve problems for our immediate lives, or even on a long-term basis, but, for instance, nobody in *The Foundation Trilogy* can perform a single act which can prevent the collapse of the Galactic Empire. Hari Seldon addresses this problem, but there is a limit to what he can do and it isn't a quick fix.

Scithers : But what he does is set into motion something which causes the Galactic Empire to have a successor before Hell freezes over.

Q : I don't think that science fiction all boils down to futility versus non-futility. It may be more a matter of plausible additions to experience which we get out of it, more than anything else. It seems to me that a science fiction story may have an extra-literary value that a fantasy story doesn't, which is that a bad fantasy story about elves is ultimately about nothing because there are no elves. But a science fiction story about colonizing the Moon may, whatever its fictional merits, contain valid ideas about colonizing the Moon, which is a real thing.

Scithers : A fantasy story about elves is in a certain sense a story about an interaction among or with a slightly different set of people, who behave in certain different ways. That is about something.

Q : I think you would admit that the science fiction story has a possible idea content that fantasy doesn't.

Scithers : I don't think so. The fantasy story about unbelievable people falls splat.

Q : One thinks of something like a Hal Clement story, which has a certain neat-idea content, quite apart from its dramatic value.

Scithers : Yes, but he knows that if he ignores H. G. Wells's rule– it's the contrast between believable people and the story's one central wonder that makes a story work– the story will go splat.

Q : Then you would basically say that any kind of fiction calls for the same storytelling values.

Scithers : If it's fiction, it would call for the same storytelling values. You're the one that brought up the point that John Beynon Harris *(better known as John Wyndham --- D. S.)* was asked if he wrote stories about airplanes, and replied that stories are about people.

Q : What advice would you give to would-be science fiction writers?

Scithers : Read it. Read some books about writing. Read some books about writing science fiction.

Q : Do you think that conditions are now favorable for new science fiction writers breaking in?

Scithers : They have been since the beginning of the century.

Q : Thank you, George.

Greep Bouillabaise

Greg Costikyan

I was raised on a remote coral isle. Few other humans lived nearby, so I made my friends among the merfolk. Though I was clumsy in the sea, lacking webbed fingers, gills, and flukes, I learned from them to swim as best a human may. Together, we explored the reefs and grottoes of the shore.

And I fell in love.

Oh, do not be shocked! Though I was a man and she but a fish, our love was strong and true!

Thalassa was her name. We hid our love from everyone we knew, for both of us knew the penalty for miscegenation. Yet we persisted.

We'd meet on the rocks by the eastern shore, and I would strip and join her in the sea. She'd tell me of the beauty of the reef; I'd tell her of the creatures of the land. Once, I brought her a bouquet of flowers; their beauty entranced her, and she took them with her. The next day, I found her crying. "They cannot survive salt water," she said dolorously. "Nor can you." I knew it was true. I knew how hopeless was our love. But there was nothing to be done, or so I thought...

One day, she appeared, eyes shining. She kissed me and said she'd found a mermage who'd taught her a spell, a spell to turn me mer.

How we rejoiced! At last, would would be together.

She recited her spell. Gills appeared along my neck. My legs merged into a single fluke. And webbing appeared between my fingers. I plunged into the sea, and together we swam into her world.

I joined a gang of fishermers to make my living; and, respectably employed, I gained the favor of her family. Soon, we were engaged.

We lived in beauty. The fish that populate the reefs are like flowers in their prime. Strange life waves gently in the currents. We drifted across the ocean, hearts and hands entwined.

I loved my work. Each morning, we ventured forth in search of prey. Swordfish we hunted with spears. Lobster, conch, and crab we harvested; but above all else, we sought the greep. For the merfolk prize the greep's flesh above all others.

Each spring, the greeps school in their thousands. Once they have bred, they scatter across the ocean and can be caught only by ones and twos. But while they run, they can be captured by the score.

Well I remember their small silver bodies, thrashing against the net. Well do I remember dolphins, gamboling through the school, eating their own fill of the ocean's bounty. Ah, the greep run was a time for rejoicing.

Greeps are small, no more than six inches long. But the merfolk have a legend of a monstrous greep, one cubits in length: the Old Greep of the Sea, he is called. And it is said that whosoever captures him is granted a single wish. I heard the legend, but thought nothing of it.

Several of the fishers in our group were female. The one I knew best was Mare. She was a lithe little creature, the fastest swimmer among us. She was positioned to my left on the net, so we saw much of each other and became fast friends.

One day, during the greep run, we labored home with a monstrous catch. Everyone was exhilarated and exhausted; and the next day promised a catch just as fine.

We went to celebrate at a grotto where merfolk purchase essences. They do not drink as humans do; instead, they uncork small bottles, release the contents into the water, and inhale this through the gills. The effect is both like and unlike bibulation.

I overindulged. And Mare swam alongside me. She kissed me, and we left the grotto for a private niche among the reefs.

And once the deed was done, I began to choke. My fluke, which Mare had thought handsome, separated in twain. My gills scabbed over. She fled from me in horror and revulsion.

I barely surfaced before I could breathe the waters no more. I was miles from the island, but I made it to land with the last of my strength.

I stumbled to my parents' house. They had given me up for dead. "Where have you been?" my father asked.

I gasped out my tale. Horror passed across their faces.

"You slept with...a fish?" my mother asked.

"Get out of my house," my father said.

I slept on the beach. The next day, I went to the special place where Thalassa and I used to meet. She never came.

But her father did. "You have ruined my daughter," he screamed, and threw a trident at me. It missed. "Animal!" he yelled, thrashing about in the bay.

"What happened?" I asked. He told me the tale.

Driven by her love for me, Thalassa had sought out and captured the Old Greep of the Sea. She had asked that I be made mer, and he had agreed. "But," the Old Greep said, "the enchantment is powered by the love between you. Should you ever be unfaithful to him, or he to you, he will revert to human form."

Laughing, Thalassa told him that would never happen. We were too much in love.

Too much in love.

And I betrayed her. "She will find no suitor now," said her father, cursing me. "No one will marry a lover of animals."

My love was lost. My parents disowned me. And so I fled my land, fled for the cold North, away from Thalassa, away from the merfolk, away from the greeps, away from everything I knew. ❧

N-sisti's Solutions

Lynne Armstrong-Jones

I look down at myself and watch as the glow from my trip gradually fades. How fortunate that my body so closely resembles those of this planet's people!

If we were *not* so very similar, it would not have been possible for me to have left my son here five Earth years ago. But how else could our people really develop an understanding of this world's cultures and societies? And so a half-dozen of my people had left our small ones behind with the unsuspecting children's agencies, knowing that families would easily be found for them until it was time for us to take them home again.

I know my son is somewhere in the area. I will need a glowing response from the sphere in my hand in order to determine his exact location.

I am smiling as I imagine what my son must now look like. Such a dramatic change between the ages of "two years" on this planet and "seven"!

And, oh, what he'll be able to tell us, now that we understand so many of the Earth languages! How tremendous it'll be to learn about these "Earthers" by listening to the words of my son.

Parting with my child for so long has been a sacrifice. Yet it will be more than worthwhile, considering the knowledge which will be gained.

My sphere finally begins to glow and then to pulsate, gently: I am getting closer.

With a flash from my mind, I'll eliminate all memories of my child from the minds of the Earther foster parents. While inside them, I'll find their memories of some other child who's visited them — likely a niece or nephew. These I'll alter, just slightly, to explain the presence of the child's possessions inside of this now-childless home.

And then my son — my N-cama — will be mine.

Just outside the front window I stop. I look inside, the pulsating of my sphere now more intense.

I am rewarded by the sight of my smiling child. He laughs, and to me the sound is like that of a thousand, tiny, tinkling bells. The male adult hugs my N-cama warmly, my son returning the embrace. The female Earther joins them, tickling my boy. He laughs again, and the three sink to the rug gaily.

I am listening as he murmurs, "I love you," to his foster mother and I hear her reply in kind.

My eyes are suddenly very moist. He is my son, I am thinking as I prepare to enter the Earther's mind.

And suddenly I am surrounded with warmth and love...from inside the Earther mind. Through the Earther's eyes I see my child as he looks with love and joy into the face of his mother —

His foster mother.

I pull away, back into myself. I want my son.

And, even as I think that, the sounds of golden laughter and joy emanate from the room. I look inside and see the three entangled in a loving embrace.

I shiver, feeling as though an icy knife is slowly cutting me in half lengthwise.

"I want my son," I find myself whispering.

I try to find the strength to enter the Earthers' minds again, but as I am about to, those tinkling bells once more seem to make my insides quiver.

Oh, the love within those walls. Is what I'm to take him to better than that? Could *anything* be?

I am not...really...sure...

My heart aches as though it has suffered the deepest of bruises. My people are *expecting* me to bring the child back. What can I do? I cannot bear to do what I'd originally intended.

But what is our purpose — truly? To learn about this Earth? *Yes.*

And, as the memory of another, yet very different Earth culture flashes through my mind, I feel the beginning of a solution.

After all, does not true understanding of a planet's people necessitate knowledge of both success and failure? Of both negative and positive?

The glow once more surrounds me as I leave.

The dry heat strikes me like a blow. I have reached my destination. I see a dark-skinned woman, sitting against a rock. She is thin — little more than bones — and flies constantly torment her. She is too weak to fend them off. Beside her sits a small, naked girl of perhaps five Earth years, belly distended and her limbs terribly thin.

The woman opens deep, brown eyes, the movement appearing to require much effort. I touch my fingers to the hot forehead. Feeling the longing of the spirit to depart, but also its fear of leaving the child, I fill the woman with a sense of peace.

I feel her flash of gatitude as she relaxes suddenly, then moves no more.

I kneel before the confused child and touch her forehead, too, sending reassurance. And I find that it feels very natural to once more hug a child to me.

I take one more look around this dry, cracked ground, and the starvation and the death. I wish I could do more. Perhaps someday.

"Thank you," I whisper to the images in my mind of the Earthers with N-cama. "Thank you. Perhaps I can now repay this Earther kindness. I, too, can take good care of a child."

I find myself whispering to the child in my arms, though she doesn't yet understand: "Surely knowledge is an empty thing if it exists without compassion?"

My eyes lock with the deep brown ones as we begin to glow, in readiness to depart... ❧

Lynne Armstrong-Jones

Theses stories are my third and fourth sales to **MZBFM**. I've also had stories accepted for **Sword and Sorceress VI and VII, Domains of Darkover** and the next Darkover anthology. (I owe special thanks to MZB for her encouragement, patience and valuable advice.)

Three of my poems have been accepted for publication by **Weird Tales**, And **Thin Ice** is holding two for possible use. One of my latest sales was an article on the 'terrible two's', purchased by **Parent-to-Parent Magazine.**

I'm employed as an adult education instructor of English grammar and literature and the rest of my time is taken up by caring for an active four year-old son (who's hooked on books: I guess that's no surprise), two twelve-year-old cats and one husband .

This summer I'll be attending my first fantasy and sf con as a 'guest' and panelist at Ad Astra in Toronto. No wonder I'm tired.

Kindred Spirits

Dennis O. Hines

It was Christmas Eve, and I was late for my bus. All of the department stores in town had closed their doors precisely at 5:00 PM, and I shopped until the last possible moment. In order to catch my bus, I was forced to take the short cut through Town Square. That's where I spotted Lucinda and Rustin.

The old couple was sitting on a park bench located along the path I had to travel. I cursed under my breath and glanced at my watch: only a few minutes more and the last bus of the day would be gone. There was no way to go around and still catch my ride, but if I walked past them, I was guaranteed to miss it while I was forced to listen to their interminable stories. The square was vacant except for some discolored iron statues of forgotten soldiers, myself, and those two bag people.

I had no choice but to attempt to sneak past them.

Soft, feathery snowflakes began to fall and cover the ground with a silken mat. The sun had already set behind dark grey storm clouds, and daylight was quickly fading into memory. The wind kicked up, tossing the delicate flakes into compact white whorls. I pulled the collar of my overcoat tighter around my neck as the frigid air nipped at my bare skin. Steam from underground pipes seeped through steel grates forming eddies as it mixed with the winter air.

It was a night to be tucked away close to a warm fireplace, and I was determined to get home.

Lucinda and Rustin were always in the park, either digging through trash cans, or sleeping on the hard benches. Besides the large paper and plastic bags they hauled around in stolen shopping carts, each carried a long, straight shaft of wood, almost like a cane except longer. Their clothes were a compendium of worn rags and discarded garments rejected by the Salvation Army. Most sensible people avoided them, but when somebody stopped to offer assistance, the couple would besiege the good Samaritan and regale him or her with long wild stories.

Once or twice I politely stopped to listen to them. The tales they wove were so odd and outrageous, I thought both of them to be crazy.

My immediate thoughts, however, were filled with strategic plans on how to sneak past them. The fresh snow cushioned the sound of my footsteps as I moved stealthily along. Both people were old and grey, and I hoped they would not hear me as I approached. As I got closer, I could hear their soft voices and creaky laughter. Something about them caused me to stop and listen.

"It's going to be a cold one again tonight," Lucinda said as she expelled puffs of steam.

"Yep," Rustin replied. "It reminds me of that winter when Richard was king."

She nodded slowly as if remembering. "You know, sometimes I can feel stirrings of the old power in my blood."

She reached out with her left hand and pointed her cane. Suddenly, a row of bright yellow daffodils sprung up from the frozen ground in front of them.

"Not bad," Rustin said with a chuckle.

He waved his staff, and bright green leaves sprouted on the trees overhead.

Lucinda held out her right hand and a robin appeared on it, cooing with delight.

Rustin pointed at the ground, and where there had been snow, there was now fresh grass, fragrant from a spring rain.

Not to be outdone, Lucinda nodded her head twice and a bubbling spring gushed forth from underneath an oak tree. She let the robin fly over the water.

A snap of the man's fingers caused the clouds above to part and a shaft of sunshine bathed the couple in its warmth.

Lucinda produced a flock of geese overhead to fill the blue skies.

Rustin turned a trash can into a yapping Brittany Spaniel.

Lucinda created a pond for the stream to flow into.

Rustin filled the pond with leaping fish.

The two elders laughed and giggled with delight over their little game, as if they were small children playing with toys.

And then Lucinda paused for a moment, as if she were thinking. She lifted both rag-covered arms and waved them overhead. There was a bright flash that temporarily blinded me. When I could see again, there were two young people sitting on the bench. They were dressed in shimmering blue gowns and their golden hair rivaled the sun that shone upon them. Their faces were smooth and worry-free, and their eyes sparkled like diamonds. Their staffs, which rested beside them, were smooth and shiny as if new. They reached out for each other's hand.

I couldn't believe what I had witnessed. I wasn't sure if I were seeing things. Time seemed to stop: all around me Spring had blossomed. The world I had known was tranformed into a new one.

As I watched the two people, I became ashamed of myself, as if I were spying on two lovers. Their ruby red lips met each other's in a long, warm embrace. I could feel their happiness bubbling inside of me.

Then, as quickly as it had happened, the illusion wavered and then shattered. Like shifting sands, their world disappeared into the wind.

Winter's icy hand had returned to the world. Snow once again blanketed the frozen earth. The trees were lifeless.

On the bench, Lucinda and Rustin continued to stare into each other's eyes, clasping their hands tightly together.

The snow began to fall faster and the wind began to gust. The two people sitting in front of me faded away in the white haze until I could no longer see them.

I turned my back, not wanting to disturb them. I decided to walk home that night. ❧

The Worgs

John F. Moore

When the red button on the console lit up, Asher knew they would never make it back to the ship alive. The red light meant the skimmer's engine was overheating. It was never meant to be run at sustained loads like this, and the Worgs were only a hundred yards behind. Asher could see them in the settling dusk, short brown fur, sinewy bodies and glowing eyes, all teeth and muscle, loping along the rocky ground with a single-minded determination. An image flashed into his brain, a memory from schoolboy days, an ancient painting of wolves chasing a sleigh across the Russian steppes. He carefully stored the thought.

Angela and Greg were huddled down behind the windscreen, not so much from the cold as to reduce the drag on the skimmer. Angela looked up at him, dark curls framing lovely dark eyes, and Asher felt a stab of anger. It wasn't right, when things were finally coming together for them, that it was going to end like this. It wasn't fair that he should lose Angela.

"How long?" she shouted, over the wind and the whine of the engine.

"An hour to reach the ship," Asher shouted back. "Ten minutes before the engine quits."

Her jaw tightened. "What do they want? They can't eat us. Different body chemistry."

"True," said Greg. "But do they know that?" He was calm. Greg was always calm. It was one of the things about him that bugged Asher.

"They're supposed to be intelligent."

"Greg," said Asher. "Did you ever hear of a painting called, 'Throwing the Baby to the Wolves?'"

"With the sled?"

"That's the one." He reached into his parka and passed Greg a maxi-pistol. "Maybe we can buy some time."

"Forget it, Asher!" snapped Angela. "You can't shoot an intelligent species. The Department will put us in the hole!"

"So who's telling? It's us or them."

Greg checked the maxi-pistol. It held five charges. "Hold her steady, Asher."

"Right." He flew the skimmer straight and level while Greg emptied the gun in one quick fusillade. It was an impossible feat of marksmanship, to hit a moving target from another moving platform, in dim light, and yet Greg brought down three Worgs with five shots. Another small personal triumph, that Asher would have resented any other time.

The result was not encouraging. The Worgs fell upon their wounded comrades and tore them to shreds. There were only a few seconds of ripping flesh and spurting blood, of white fangs gleaming in the darkness, and then they took up the chase again.

"They're gaining," said Greg. Asher nodded.

"I was afraid of that," he said. "They must have been hanging back on purpose. They knew we might be armed. And now they know we're empty." The light on the console was blinking furiously.

Angela was staring in fixed horror as the Worgs closed the distance between them. They were close enough now to see the fresh blood on their muzzles. "Oh no," she said quietly, and then louder each time. "Oh no, oh no, oh no!"

He shook her shoulder. "Angela, baby, listen careful now. This is the moment of truth. Who do you love more, me or Greg?"

"What?" said Greg.

Angela whipped her head around. "What?"

"Who do you love better, me or Greg?"

"Asher, I hardly think this is the time to discuss this," Greg said calmly.

"Shut up!" Asher put his hand over the flashing red danger light and glanced back. The Worgs were only yards behind the skimmer. "Angela, we've only got a few minutes. You have to answer me *right now*?"

"I love both of you the same, you moron," screeched Angela. "Are you crazy?"

"That's good enough," said Asher, and he kicked Greg over the side. Greg had time for one brief scream before he disappeared beneath the savage, tearing mass of brown bodies. Angela's wail of sorrow lingered long on the cold air.

They came back the next day to look for Greg's remains. They took an armored crawler, and they both carried power rifles, but they didn't need them. The Worgs they saw simply glared at them balefully, or else ignored them.

There wasn't much left of Greg. A pile of dead Worgs surrounded his bones. A dozen more lay scattered some distance away, brown bodies contorted in agonized death.

"He poisoned them" said Angela.

Asher nodded. "Like you said, different body chemistry. They can't eat us. But Greg had to sacrifice himself to teach them that."

"Sacrifice himself! Greg didn't sacrifice himself! You murdered him, you jerk."

"Well, yeah. But I can hardly put that in the official report. It was one of us or all of us. At least this way he'll be a hero."

"Very noble of you. Let me ask you something, Asher. Suppose I had said that I liked Greg better. Would you have sacrificed *yourself* to save our love?"

Asher looked at her a long time, her windblown hair, and her deep, dark eyes. He remembered the long nights when the ship hung between the stars and her sleeping breath was on his chest. The quiet talks in the darkened cabin. The way her fingers traced small circles on his back when he held her to him.

He shrugged. "I never liked Greg anyway."❧

John Moore writes:

I am a chemical engineer who lives and works in Houston, TX. I have been published in **Writers of the Future Vol IV, Aboriginal SF, New Destinies, Starshore, Figment, Beyond,** and **Space and Time.**

I like eating out and have recently joined a single's gourmet dining club.

John and Mary

Frank C. Gunderloy, Jr.

Although John's general appearance allowed him to masquerade among human males with little fear of detection, he was necessarily forced to be extremely circumspect in his dealings with the females.

On his home planet Thoxium, of course, John's flamboyant mating display dazzled every female Thoxy within a hundred yards whenever any tactile stimulus forced a "Hoot-hoot-hoot" out of him. With every "hoot", his pillow-sized throat-sacks filled and swelled, ballooning from his neck like the wattles of some strutting bower-bird, flashing slick-moist and scarlet in the sunlight, pulsing as the lacework of veins and arteries telegraphed every beat of his heart. Then came the low but audible "hiss-s-s" as the air trickled away and the chambers collapsed, leaving, at the last, a neck resembling that of any normal human male. A little wrinkled beneath the chin, yes, but still passable, even without scarf or ascot.

John was indeed passable—and passing. Passing as a human, that is, as he studied and moved among them, ever expanding the data base he was amassing for his thesis on variations in facial hair among the upright hominids.

Mary had spotted John as a new neighbor when she left for work on a Monday morning. She was at first a bit disconcerted and not a little surprised, since Sunday had not been marred by the lumpy noises of someone moving into the apartment next door. In singles' complexes, silence represents maximum departure from the norm. But, no matter, she adopted John almost instantly, having him to dinner and instructing him in the intricacies of coin-operated laundry. Their friendship ripened quickly, although she was unable to fathom his incessant habit of staring at everyone, herself included, as if they were in the crosshairs of some implacable gunsight. However, as she grew to think of him as possibly more than a friend, another habit, even more disturbing than the first, began to manifest itself.

John would not touch her.

If Mary sat down on the sofa, John stood up and moved to the chair. If Mary passed him the potatoes across the table, John would find it necessary to reach for the salt on the sideboard. If they walked somewhere together, she found herself maneuvered into positions a pace behind, a pace ahead, or one step to the side. Passing him in the hallway was impossible; such encounters became clumsy waltzes of advances and retreats that only ended when one or the other of them escaped into a doorway. And still, through it all, he was a pleasant conversationalist, a superb listener, a gentleman in the old-world sense, and he obviously liked her, even if he had never-ever-ever offered the slightest hint that he might express his affection in any of the usual fashions.

Two attempts at entrapment were unsuccessful. Once he had left her hugging only thin air as he cleverly sidestepped her embrace from behind the bathroom door. A sneak attack under the guise of recovering a dropped fork from beneath the dining room table also came up empty. However, John's leaping to stand on the seat of his chair under the pretext of inspecting a spider on the ceiling simply failed to ring true.

Mary toyed briefly with the idea of putting a direct question to John about the nature of his problem, but perhaps because she was a little afraid of what the answer might be, she decided instead to take one more really good stab at the only slightly less direct "grab-him-and-hope" game.

And so it was, on a warm summer evening, that John stepped through Mary's door for their usual Wednesday dinner date, only to be greeted by a camera going off FLASH in his eyes, a firecracker going off BANG in his ear, a broomstick going off CRACK against his shins, and before he could recover, a set of warm, soft, seeking lips going off OOOOH against his mouth. John struggled to maintain his self control, but Mary, her arms locked behind his neck, flopped backwards into an easy chair, drawing him inexorably down upon her.

Hoot-hoot-hoot!!!!!

To this day, Mary will not ride in an automobile equipped with an airbag. ❧

Rude Awakening

Larry Hodges

You are incurably diseased. But you do not want to die. Modern Medicine cannot help you — but perhaps in the future it will.

You decide to have your body frozen. You go to a medical institute. You are stripped of your clothing, and told to lie down in what looks like a coffin with a window on top. The window is closed but doctors and nurses keep looking in at you. You are embarassed, but know it is all for the best. Sweet smelling gas pours into the coffin. You go to sleep, smiling.

The coffin is set to awaken you in one thousand years. It is protected by impervious force fields. You are completely safe, no matter what happens in the millenium.

Two hundred years into your sleep, a cure for your disease is discovered. But in the two centuries, records of your sleep have been lost. You are not awakened to be cured. But the computer controller of your coffin, inside the force field with you, receives the information. Upon awakening, it will cure you. You don't know this, but the gift of life has been returned to you.

Argons from Argellius Four attack Earth five hundred years into your sleep. The Earth is atomized, everybody dies. But you are untouched, protected by the impervious force fields. Nothing is left of Earth — your body, enclosed in a coffin, is left floating in empty space. But Earth colonies still exist on various planets of the solar system. When you awaken, they will rescue you.

field finally shimmers and dies. Sweet smelling air is pumped into the coffin, and you awaken. You take in lungfuls of oxygen, feeling alive again. Alive, precious life! Sheer Joy! Blood pumping through arteries, breath into lungs!

The glass top to the coffin opens.... ❧

Larry Hodges has a degree in math but only uses it when numbering pages of his stories. He is taking journalism classes in his free time and plans to start work on a master's degree in journalism this Fall. He is also an avid table tennis player who recently won Open Doubles at the National College Table Tennis Championships in April. This is his fourth appearance in **MZBFM.***

A Disgruntled Blue Collar Worker's Cry For Help In An Unsympathetic World

Selina Rosen

Maintenance Log for Auto Stapler

1/3/90
Maintenance,
Please check motor belt.
Thanks M.F.

1/3/90
Mildred,
Replaced belt, no problem.
Maintenance

2/14/90
Maintenance,
Staples are jamming up and the air line is making noise. M.F.

2/14/90
Mildred,
There was a dead mouse in the staple feedin tube and a small hole in the air line. Both were easily repaired.
Maintenance

2/16/90
Everything looks to be in order.
Management

3/6/90
Maintenance,
The machine is making an awful racket. Also the staples are batching up in irregular patterns. M.F.

3/7/90
Mildred,
Sorry it took us a while to get to it. Seems like everything breaks at once. We couldn't find anything wrong. Maybe the problem corrected itself. Maintenance

3/8/90
Maintenance,
It is still doing the same thing and now it is vibrating too. I hope you can fix, it the noise is driving me nuts. M.F.

3/8/90
Mildred,
Sorry but it seems to be fine now. No noise, no vibration but I'll keep my eye on it. Maintenance

3/9/90
I can't believe you guys can't see this. The damn thing is shaking so much I fear at any moment it shall make a run for the door.
Please do something, even if it's wrong! Mildred

3/9/90
Ok Mildred keep your girdle on. One of the lifters was broken. We repaired it and you shouldn't have any trouble with it now. Maintenance

3/10/90
Funny guys. You didn't do a damn thing to this machine. It's doing the same thing. All the staples are bunching up in big clumps every 6 inches. That's the only real difference that I see. M.F.

3/10/90
Mildred,
There is nothing wrong with this machine.
Maybe you should take a Midol. Fred

3/11/90
Fred,
I believe that you don't see anything wrong with the machine. I think it purposely behaves in your presence. I don't know how to say this but lately I get the feeling that...well that there is a presence here. Like some sentient being is trying to take control of the machine. Mildred

3/11/90
Maybe we should call in an exorcist. Maintenance

3/12/90
Maintenance,
I know you think I'm daft. But I am telling you this thing is acting weird. I now believe that it is trying to create a pattern with the staples. I think it is trying to communicate. Isn't there anything you can do? M.F.

3/12/90
Mildred,
I admit it must be boring sitting in the corner of the shop away from everyone. But you're going to have to stop writing all this weirdo stuff on the report pad. You know the boss takes this seriously. Maintenance

3/13/90
I don't care whether you guys think I'm pulling a joke or just plain bonkers. I'm telling you this machine is being controlled by aliens from anothe—

3/13/90
Mildred,
You can't just walk off the job in the middle of the work day. And I don't think anybody thinks it's funny that you took the machine. Inventive. But not funny.
Well maybe just a little. Maintenance

3/14/90
Mildred,
Bring the machine back and get back on the job or you're fired!
Management ❧

The Man Who Slipped Between Years

Mark Fewell

It started when the August 1987 issue of *Isaac Asimov's* and the 1988 August issue of *Analog* appeared in the mailbox on the same day. Karry Cummings wouldn't have thought much of this (he hadn't read that issue of *IA's* though he was sure he had gotten it a year ago) if not for the brief instant he stood in the coolness of the previous summer.

Such occurrences started to become more frequent in the life of Karry Cummings. The next such occurrence was when he was at the park alone. Shortly after sitting on a bench, Karry found himself at the family reunion of the previous year.

As such things became more common, Karry discovered that all of the strange slips in time happened exactly one year from each other (he was slipping between the years) and he decided he needed a way to use his ability to his advantage.

The day he got fired from Harrowsmith was coming up. Perhaps this time he would be able to keep from calling his foreman a malicious malcontent mongrel who was too damn blind and stupid to know good work when he saw it. This time Karry would hold his tongue and temper despite the fact that he had the world's most incompetent boss. There were worse places to work than Harrowsmith. There might even be worse bosses than Rick Peterson. Karry had yet to find one. But his current job was so bad, he would do anything to get back in the good graces of Harrowsmith.

That left Karry stuck with one problem. How could he be sure that his power would work when he wanted it to? How had this power worked before?

The first time he was hoping that the two speculative fiction magazines (he hated the terms science fiction or sci-fi) would be in his mailbox and in an unusual sort of way, they were.

Hadn't he thought back to what a great summer he had last year both at the mailbox and at the park? Hadn't he been horny when he had found himself back in Rebecca's arms? It seemed that for Karry to slip between the years, all he had to do was to think real hard about what he wanted.

Karry's next problem was how to get into Harrowsmith. Harrowsmith was patrolled by armed security guards. Karry saw that problem easily solved by posing as a new employee.

The guard gave Karry the directions he gave to all new employees. Karry found himself inside Harrowsmith for the first time in a year. He didn't follow the guard's directions. He needed to make it to his old work station. He hoped that nobody would notice he wasn't wearing a badge. With that hope, he found himself wearing his badge. He had slipped into the past.

"Get in here, Cummings," yelled Peterson.

Karry walked into Peterson's office, biting on his tongue. He would not lose his temper. He would not! Karry took the abuse of the malicious malcontent mongrel and retained his job.

When Karry left work he looked down at his digital watch. "8/6/88." He was back in '88.

The second goal he set was to get back to his wife, Rebecca.

Karry had been unfaithful only once in the years he had been married. Once was all it took for Rebecca to find out. This time he would refuse to take the other woman home with him. No matter how good she looked, or how many beers he had.

He waited until the day he had met the home wrecker. What was her name? Charlene? Suzanne? Cindi? The one thing he could remember about that night was he had met a woman with a sexy name. Now he couldn't remember the name.

It had happened at a place called PJ's Lounge a year in the past. Karry planned to be at this place called PJ's one year from the anniversary of his affair.

He walked into PJ's. It was empty except for the bartender. It was not at all like the night he and a few buddies had stopped in after work to get something to drink. Karry walked to the bar and ordered a rum and coke.

As the place began to fill with people, Karry began to slip into the past. His rum and Coke became a beer. Nate was shooting pool. Nate and Karry had been playing eight ball a year ago when the strawberry blond had asked him if he would like to dance. The dance would be his downfall, but that made it easy. All he had to do was refuse to dance with the woman and his troubles would be over.

Karry looked across the table after having sunk the nine ball in the corner pocket. The destroyer of his future life and wife was walking straight toward him. "Hi, I'm Cherry," said the gorgeous female. "Wanna dance?" Cherry? This was the name he thought was sexy a year ago! Funny, with Rebecca out of his life, Cherry was no longer a sexy name.

"No, sorry, I don't," said Karry. Refusing Cherry was not as easy as Karry thought it was going to be. She grabbed Karry and attempted to slip her tongue between his lips.

"Lady! I'm a married man," said Karry, as he pushed her body from his.

"I don't care. Married men are the best," said Cherry.

"I think it's time to leave," said Karry to his friends. "Alone!" he said to Cherry. She was following him out the door. He would take no chances that Rebecca would see him with Cherry this time. He ran down the street with the hope that Cherry wouldn't follow. She didn't.

Karry walked into his house, the house Rebecca had let him keep. He could tell by the calendar on the wall that he was back in the present. He walked into the bedroom. Rebecca was in his...*their* bed. It seemed that for a long time he hadn't used the words "their" or "ours". If Rebecca only knew what he went through, he would...what? Rebecca would never believe him. It was better that she knew nothing about the affair he had had. Or had he? ❧

Mark Fewell : I work in the shipping department of a company that makes artificial Christmas trees and plastic swimming pools. I started writing two years ago, and have sold stories to **After Hours, New Blood,** and **Festering Brainsore.** I have sold poetry to **Starsong** and the **SPWAO Newsletter.** My one published item so far is my poem 'What I Did With The Rejection Slip,' which appeared in the SPWAO Newsletter (Jan/Feb 90).

I collect comics, ride a bike, am an Indianapolis Colts fan. I have had all kinds of jobs including military intelligence work for the army and selling Kirby vacuum cleaners door-to-door. NowI am currently working on a novel, "Timewinds' which also deals with time travel,and write reviews for Susan Salaki"s **Guidelines Magazine.**

Turbo Charged

Mark O'Connor

The house vibrated gently, as if its very fabric had suddenly become electrified. For one moment the front windows rattled softly, the miniature chandelier rocked, and the clothes in the front of the closet swayed ever so slightly.

It was barely noticeable, just enough to let Garnet know that the Turbo Train had whizzed past his house again at three hundred kilometers per hour. It was just enough to break his concentration from the Matter/Energy Conversion Reconstitution System.

Garnet irritably glanced away from his computer screen to the false wall that served as the back of the closet. Candace, his pet Irish Setter, perked up her ears. She barked and quickly gained her feet, showing no signs of the crippling arthritis she'd suffered with before he'd put her through the Converter. He stroked her neck, calming her, until she settled back down at his feet.

Garnet drew a deep breath, held it, then released it slowly. The Turbo disturbed him far more than it should, and he knew it. Being able to focus in and concentrate on the job at hand was something he was proud of, but that infernal train grated on his nerves the way a rattle in a private vehicle could. Eleven thousand plus passes a year would do that.

With an audible creak of his bones, Garnet stood and stretched his sixty year old body, trying to put himself back in the right frame of mind. Maybe the Turbo wouldn't have bothered him so much if the city hadn't decided to run the bloody thing so close. He knew that with things as crowded as they were, he was lucky even to have a house, but were things so tight that they had to run the blasted Magnetic Monster fifty feet from his front doorstep?

When he complained about the Turbo Train to his colleagues at the University, which was often, that was how he always ended it. What he didn't tell his friends was that it wasn't the small disturbances, but the the fact that the slight energy flux created by the Turbo's magnetic system threw the instrumentation off on his Converter. It was the Turbo's charge that galled him.

Garnet sat back down and quickly got to work readjusting the instrumentation and settings of the Converter. Each time that infernal train passed, he had to take time to perform this small, but very necessary task. That was really the annoying thing, but he couldn't tell anyone that.

Instead he raved on like a lunatic about the Turbo bothering him because it ran so close to his house. He was sure that at times his colleagues must have thought he was certifiable.

Ahhhh, hell. None of it mattered tonight. He worked feverishly at the console, in-puting the last of the data on his body composition. He ran a program to check for errors, then checked the program itself to ensure it wasn't faulty. Then he checked for errors again. He couldn't have anything go wrong now.

Finally satisfied, he leaned back and contemplated the enormity of it all. The Mass/Energy Conversion Reconstitution System was now ready for the final test. Tonight he was going to validate all these years of working in a ridiculously small space chasing the impossible dream. Tonight he was going to convert himself into a concentrated beam of energy, dissolving himself at the molecular level into pure energy, and then reconstitute himself.

And while he was reconstituting he would have the computer reconstitute it a few years younger! Not so's anyone would take a whole lot of notice, but enough so that he would notice. He had to start shaving a few years off here and there because he had to stick around until mankind had advanced enough to be able to use wisely this wonderful device.

As much as he would like, he couldn't allow the Converter to become available to the public at large. The population problem was horrendous now; what would it be like if people effectively could have immortality? Or what would happen if some fanatic reconstituted himself in a missle silo? No, mankind wasn't ready to be Converted...just yet.

Garnet got up and slowly walked around the Converter, with Candace trailing, admiring his handiwork. It didn't look like much, he decided, though the observation didn't dampen his pride any. It struck him that it looked like one of those large hair dryers with the domes that sat over the head. He'd seen them in some old mid-twentieth century movies. Except that this dome was attached to a super plexiglass cylinder that extended to a circular brass plate on the floor, and, of course, it didn't dry hair very well. However, it could transplant hair.

Transplanting people and transforming them into more youthful models was done just as easily! Of this Garnet was sure, even though he hadn't tested it yet on a human subject. He had sent enough objects through the Converter, reconstituting them in his living room, to know that it worked on inanimate objects. And he'd just completed two years of testing on rats, and, most recently, on Candace, to prove that it worked on living organic matter as well. The test showed no ill effects at all.

He looked down at Candace who immediately gazed up at her master.

Certainly, he could say there was no loss of intelligence or personality or anything else. Was there, Candace? He stroked Candace's silky fur.

No. It worked. And tonight he would be the final test.

It was a difficult situation in which he found himself. On the one hand, if he gave the Converter to the public, he might just as well hand mankind a death sentence. On the other hand, the Converter could be mankind's salvation, if used properly, if used by wise and right-minded people. Like himself.

Garnet set the controls, then stripped naked. He opened the cylinder door and stepped inside, onto the brass plate.

He drew in a nervous breath.

It wasn't as easy as he thought it might be. He knew there was nothing to be afraid of, but that was easier to say when he wasn't actually going to be blasted into so many particles of energy. For a few seconds, farts would have more substance than he would.

With that thought, Garnet reopened the door, automatically breaking the systems run, and stepped out of the Converter. Candace came over and licked his hand.

"I know, girl," he said. "I'm being a chicken shit. There's nothing to be afraid of."

He stared at the Converter, trying to quell his fear. He had to do it. There was absolutely no choice. If he didn't, he would have to destroy the Converter, because mankind wasn't at a stage where it could be handled. Yet, to destroy it would be to destroy something which, by the same coin, might be mankind's saving grace. Preserving a wise leader or dissolving a launched nuclear warhead might be the sort of thing that would put humans over the hump in the struggle to preserve the species.

He drew in a deep breath. It was imperative that he stay alive and keep the secret of the Converter. The very future of the world depended on him being brave and getting back into the Converter. It would be morally wrong to allow himself to age further.

He was, without any question, the most important person in the world.

He was indispensable.

He had to do it.

Steeling his resolve, Garnet reset the controls and stepped back inside.

He didn't see Candace bark at the false wall. He didn't know that the Turbo was fast approaching as he was dissolved. He had no idea the settings were altered...slightly.

Moments after the lasers had dissolved him, he was reconstituted. Right in front of the Turbo Train.

The young assistant to the driver was the only one able to hold his gorge down when he saw what was left of Garnet, but he was philosophical about the accident.

"It's too bad," he said to the policeman at the scene. "But he was old and no one lives forever." ❧

Voices

Janet R. Rhodes

Not until they started warning about imminent attack did Coryn reluctantly approach the authorities. Then, because of the implications, he drove directly to Fort Lewis.

He'd tried to tell friends. "Yeah, and I bet you have some swamp land in Florida for sale," Ryan had chucked.

"You're working too hard, Corrie," Michael had added. "Take a vacation.,"

Coryn stopped at the gate and explained his mission. The M.P., eyebrows raised, said, "Take the U-turn. Get out."

"What?" Corrie's voice climbed octaves. "I've got to see the Commander. I'm on an important mission!"

"You heard me," the man said evenly. "Out!"

Coryn gritted his teeth. "I have to get in. Warn about the attack!" Frustration tightened his calf muscles which forced the accelerator down and edged his car forward.

The M.P. snapped his sidearm into firing position. "Get out," he growled. "Now."

A funny kind of cold scratched inside Coryn's belly, then made a heavy fist. "Well, if that —" he cried and spun his wheels around the tight turn before peeling out.

Voices, insistent whispers, stirred and followed him along the freeway, north to Tacoma.

Coryn pounded the steering wheel. "Where can I go? Someone has to listen. Before it's too late." It was no longer simply frustration at unknown voices following him everywhere, providing a running commentary on the drunk stumbling along the sidewalk, the kids skateboarding...the woman on Fourth Street wearing a bulky, red coat. He had run three blocks to check it out. And she had been there!

"Damn-it! Leave me alone!" Coryn clenched the wheel, his knuckles white. The voices subsided for moments, seconds, a minute.

They're coming. The armada is approaching. In a few years they will reach your solar system. The voices began like rustling leaves, built until they pulsed with the beat of his heart. Coryn shook his head. "Pick on someone else!"

You must warn the authorities. Tell them to prepare for the enemy's attack. There will be no mercy. Build your defenses. Call the nations together. Organize! Prepare!

A horn screamed, forcing the young man to open eyes he had closed for just a moment, eyes stinging wih tears. A beat-up van rode his fender. Close, too close. Startled, Coryn scanned the freeway, realized he had wandered toward the center lane. He caught his breath, jerked the wheel right, and veered onto the shoulder. Swearing, he pulled the wheel and brought the car back onto the road.

The voices kept railing in Coryn's brain. *Convince the authorities. Now. The armada of the Galactic Conquest draws nearer. Nothing can stop them. Unless —*

"Stop!" He groaned, struggling to get to the next exit, to get off, to find someone, anyone who would listen. Maybe. Someone had to.

Through tunneling vision Coryn saw a green sign, a lane veering right. Suddenly blue and red streaks split his vision. A shrieking siren added to the ringing in his ears. Trembling, Coryn slowed, pulled to the shoulder and sat gulping air as the patrol car crunched to a stop behind him.

A new voice, deep and male, startled him. "Wha-a-," said Coryn as the inner voices rose in jubilation. *Speak to him. Convince him.* Paralyzed by the assaulting voices, Coryn could not comprehend the officer's repeated questions.

Trooper Payne, noting Coryn's confusion and dilated eyes, asked again, "Sir, do you realize you've been weaving all over the road? Sir?"

Louder and louder the voices pelted their demands — *You must warn the authorities. The fate of the world lies in your hands* — until Coryn's lips echoed the words.

The trooper took one step, two steps backward.

Then Coryn burst from the car, eyes wide and blazing. "The aliens are coming. Do something!" Payne began to croon reassuring words and Coryn erupted, "No! You don't understand. Listen! They'll kill us all, or worse."

Panic crept into the officer's eyes, but he kept up a steady patter, "We'll get you help, it'll be all right..."

Coryrn screeched, "Listen to me. I know. I know what to do!" He reached out to grab the trooper's shoulders, to shake him into understanding. Then his world went dark.

"Lost him." Dekkyer's eye-stalks waved and tangled.

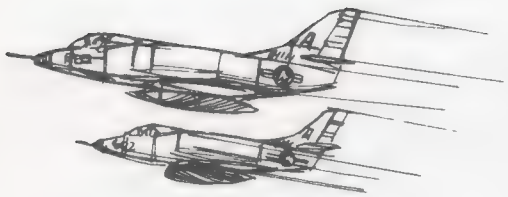
"Dead?" Kellran peered at the view screen set into the globed starship's side.

"No-o-o." Dekkyer blew air through his puckered mouth. "Knocked out. The man's binding his arms. It'll be like the others." Defeat flattened his voice. "Locked up and no one will believe him."

"Perhaps we need to be more insistent."

Dekkyer nodded, and they formed images, sent them into the mind of the human on the blue planet. *Alert. The armada of the Galactic Conquest will arrive within a few years. The tyrants have no mercy; they will destroy your planet. Alert. Alert...*

Trooper Payne glanced up, a perplexed look on his face . ❧



ROADKILL

by Mercedes Lackey

A gust of wind hit the side of George Randal's van and nearly tore the steering wheel out of his hands. He cursed as the vehicle lurched sideways, and wrestled it back into his own lane.

It was a good thing there weren't too many people on the road. It was just a very good thing that Mingo Road was a four-lane at this point, or he'd have been in the ditch. A mile away, it wasn't, but all the shift traffic from the airline maintenance base, the Rockwell plant, and the McDonnell-Douglas plant where he worked, would have put an intolerable strain on a two-lane road.

The stoplight at Mingo and 163rd turned yellow, and rather than push his luck, he obeyed it, instead of doing an "Okie caution" ("Step on the gas, Fred, she's fixin' to turn red"). This was going to be another typical late-spring Oklahoma day. Wind gusting up to 60 per, and rain off and on. Used to be, when he was a kid, it'd be dry as old bones by this late in the season, but not anymore. All the flood-control projects and water-management dams had changed the micro-climate, and it was unlikely this part of Oklahoma would ever see another Dust Bowl.

Although with winds like this, he could certainly extrapolate what it had been like, back the during the thirties.

The habit of working a mental simulation was so ingrained it was close to a reflex; once the thought occurred, his mind took over, calculating wind-speed, type of dust, carrying capacity of the air. He was so intent on the internal calculations that he hardly noticed when the light turned green, and only the impatient honk of the car behind him jolted him out of his reverie. He pulled the van out into the intersection, and the red sports car behind him roared around him, its driver giving him the finger as he passed.

"You son of a —" he noted with satisfaction the MacDac

parking permit in the corner of the rear window: the vanity plate was an easy one to remember, 'HOTONE'. He'd tell a little fib to the guard at the guard shack, and have the jerk cited for reckless driving in the parking lot. That would go on his work record, and serve him right, too.

If it hadn't been for the combination of the wind gust and the fool in the red IROC, he would never have noticed the strange behavior of that piece of cardboard in the median strip.

But because of the gust, he knew which direction the wind was coming from. When the IROC screamed right over the center-line, heading straight toward a piece of flattened box, and the box skittered just barely out of the way as if the wind had picked it up and moved it in time, something went off in his brain.

As he came up even to where the box had been, he saw what the thing had been covering; roadkill, a dead 'possum. At that exact moment he knew what had been wrong with the scene a second before, when the box had moved. Because it had moved against the wind.

He cast a startled glance in his rear-view mirror just in time to see the box skitter back, with the wind this time, and stop, just covering the dead animal.

That brought all the little calculations going on in his head to a screeching halt. George was an orderly man, a career engineer, whose one fervent belief was that everything could be explained in terms of physics if you had enough data.

Except that this little incident was completely outside his ordered universe.

He was so preoccupied with trying to think of an explanation for the box's anomalous behavior that he didn't remember to report the kid in the sports car at the guard shack. He couldn't even get his mind on the new canard specs he'd been so excited about yesterday. Instead he sat at his desk, playing with the CAD/CAM computer, trying to find some way for that box to have done what it did.

And coming up dry. It should not, could not, have moved that way, and the odds against it moving back to exactly the same place were unbelievable.

He finally grabbed his gym-bag, left his cubicle, and headed for the tiny locker room MacDac kept for those employees who had taken up running or jogging on their lunch breaks. Obviously he was not going to get anything done until he checked the site out, and he might just as well combine that with his lunch-time exercise. Today he'd run out on Mingo instead of around the base.

A couple of Air National Guard A-4s cruised by overhead, momentarily distracting him. He'd forgotten exactly where the roadkill had been, and before he was quite ready for it, he was practically on top of it. Suddenly he was no longer quite sure that he wanted to do this. It seemed silly, a fantasy born of too many late-night movies. But as long as he was out here . . .

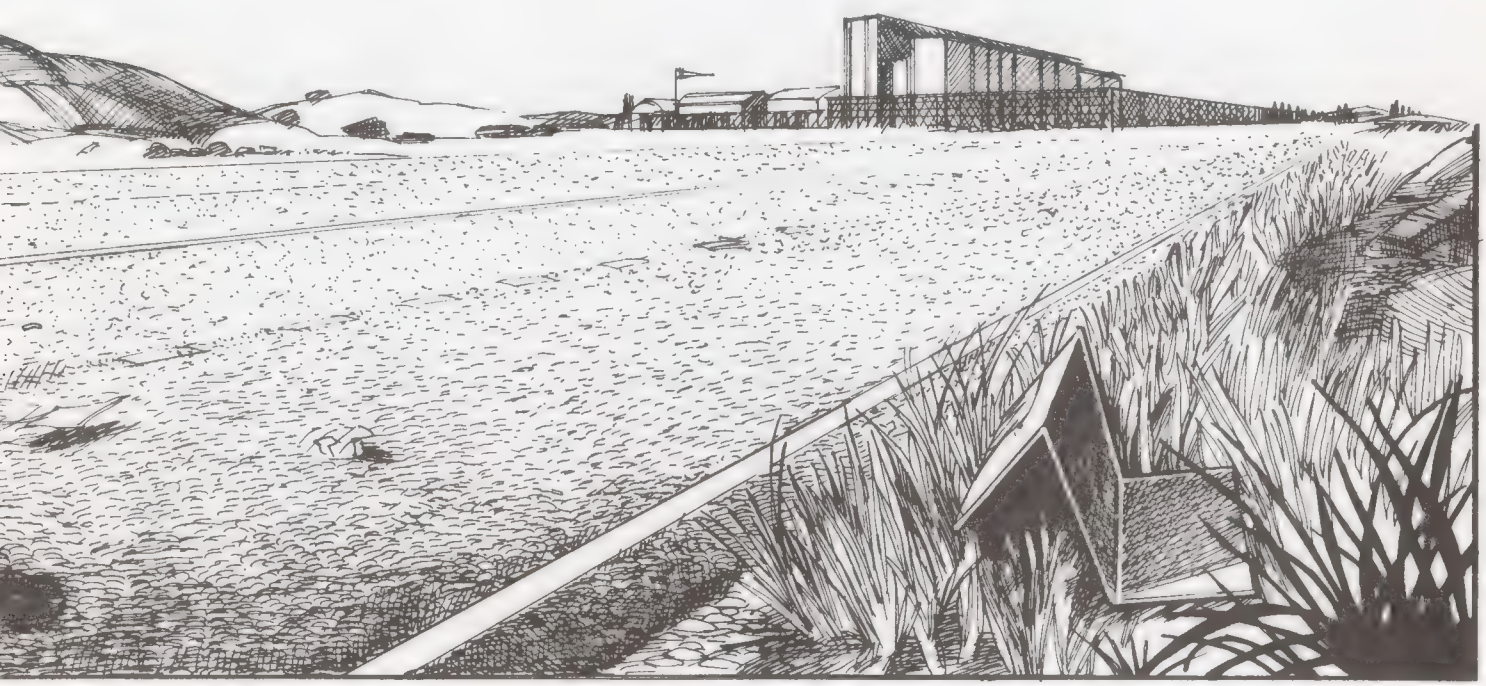
The box was nowhere in sight. Feeling slightly foolish, he crossed to the median and took a good look at the body.

It was half-eaten, which wasn't particularly amazing. Any roadkill that was relatively fresh was bound to get chewed on.

Except that the last time he'd seen roadkill on the median, it had stayed there until it bloated, untouched. Animals didn't like the traffic; they wouldn't go after carrion in the middle of the road if they could help it.

And there was somehting wrong with the way the bite-marks looked too. Old Boy Scout memories came back, tracking and identifying animals by signs . . .

The flesh hadn't been bitten off so much as carved off - - as if the carcass had been chewed by something with enormous buck teeth, like some kind of carnivorous horse, or beaver. Nothing in his experience made marks like that.



As a cold tricklel ran down his spine, a rustle in the weeds at the side of the road made him jump. He looked up.

The box was there, in the weeds. He hadn't seen it, half-hidden there, until it had moved. It almost seemed as if the thing was watching him; the way it had a corner poked out of the weeds like a head....

His reaction was stupid and irrational, and he didn't care. He bolted, and ran all the way back to the guard shack with a chill in his stomach that all his running couldn't warm.

He didn't stop until he reached the guard shack and the safety of the fenced-in MacDac compound, the sanity and rational universe of steel and measurement where nothing existed that could not be simulated on a computer screen.

He slowed to a gentle jog as he passsed the shack; he'd have liked to stop, because his heart was pounding so hard he couldn't hear anything, but if he did, the guards would ask him what was wrong..

He waited until he was just out of sight, and then dropped to a walk. He remembered from somewhere, maybe one of his jogging tapes, that it was a bad idea just to stop, that his muscles would stiffen. Actually he had the feeling if he went to his knees on the verge like he wanted to, he'd never get up again.

He reached the sanctuary of his air-conditioned office and slumped down into his chair, still panting. He waited with his eyes closed for his heart to stop pounding, while the sweat cooled and dried in the gust of metallic-flavored air from the vent over his chair. He tired to summon up laughter at himself, a grown man, for finding a flattened piece of cardboard so frighteninng, but the laughter wouldn't come.

Instead, other memories of those days as a Boy Scout returned, of the year he'd spent at camp where he'd learned those meager tracking skills. One of the counselors had a grandfather who was— or so the boy claimed — a full Cherokee medicine man. He'd persuaded the old man to make a visit to the camp. George had found himself impressed against his will, as had the rest of the Scouts; the old man still wore his hair in two long, iron-gray braids, and a bone necklace under his plain work-shirt. He had a dignity and self-possession that kept all of the rowdy adolescents in awe of him and silent when he spoke.

He'd condescended to tell stories at their campfire several times. Most of them were tales of what his life had been like as a boy on the reservation at the turn of the century — but once or twice he'd told them bits of odd Indian lore, not all of it Cherokee.

Like the shape-changers. George didn't remember what he'd called them, but he did recall what had started the story. One of the boys had seen *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* before he'd come to camp, and he was regaling all of them with a vivid description of Michael Landon's transformation into the monster. The old man had listened, and scoffed. That was no kind of shape-changer, he'd told them scornfully. Then he had launched into a new story.

George no longer recalled the words, but he remembered the gist of it. How the shape-changers would prey upon the Indians in a peculiar fashion; stealing what they wanted by deception. If one wanted meat, for instance, he would transform himself into a hunter's game-bag and wait for the Indian to stuff the "bag" full, then shift back and carry the game off while the hunter's back was turned. If one wanted a new buffalo-robe, he would transform himself into a stretching-frame — or if very ambitious, into a tipi, and make off with all of the inhabitant's worldly goods.

"Why didn't they just turn into horses and carry everything off?" he'd wanted to know.

The old man had shaken his head. "Because they cannot take a living form," he'd said. "Only a dead one. And you do not want to catch them, either. Better for you to pretend it never happened."

But he wouldn't say what would happen if someone did catch the thief at work. He only looked, for a brief instant, very frightened, as if he had not intended to say that much.

George suddenly felt sick. What if these things, these shape-changers, weren't just legend. What could they be living on now? They wouldn't be able to sneak into someone's house and counterfeit a refrigerator.

But there was all that roadkill, enough dead animals along Mingo alone each year to keep someone going, if that someone wasn't too fastidious.

And what would be easier to mimic than an old, flattened box?

He wanted to laugh at himself, but the laughter wouldn't come. This was such a stupid fantasy, built out of nothing but a boy's imagination and a box that didn't behave the way it ought to.

Instead, he only felt sicker, and more frightened. Now he could recall the one thing the old man had said about the creatures and their fear of discovery.

"They do not permit it," he'd said, as his eyes widened in that strange flicker of fear. *They do not permit it.*

Finally he just couldn't sit there anymore. He picked up the phone and mumbled something to his manager about feeling sick, grabbed his car keys and headed for the parking lot. Several of the others on the engineering staff looked at him oddly as he passed their desks; the secretary even stopped him and asked if he felt all right. He mumbled something that didn't change her look of concern, and assured her that he was going straight home.

He told himself that he was going to do just that. He even had his turn-signal on for a right-hand turn, fully intending to take the on-ramp at Pine and take the freeway home.

But instead he found himself turning left, where the roadkill was still lying.

He saw it as he came up over the rise; and the box was lying on top of it once again.

Suddenly desperate to prove to himself that this entire fantasy he'd created around a dead 'possum and a piece of cardboard was nothing more that that, he jerked the wheel over and straddled the median, gunning the engine and heading straight for the dingy brown splotch of the flattened box.

There was no wind now; if the thing moved, it would have to do so under its own power.

He floored the accelerator, determined that the thing wasn't going to escape his tires.

It didn't move; he felt a sudden surge of joy - - -

Then the thing struck.

It leapt up at the last possible second, landing with a splat , splayed across his windshield. He had a brief, horrifying impression of some kind of face, flattened and distorted, red eyes and huge, beaver-like teeth as long as his hand—

Then it was gone, and the car was out of control, tires screaming, wheel wrenching under his hands.

He pumped his brakes — once, twice — then the pedal went flat to the floor.

And as the car heeled over on two wheels, beginning a high-speed roll that could have only one ending, that analytical part of his mind that was not screaming in terror was calculating just how easy it would be for a pair of huge, chisel-like teeth to shear through a brake-line. ❧

WHY HORROR FICTION?

by Darrell Schweitzer

Why horror fiction? Lots of people want to know. They stare at us aficionados as if we had three heads and fangs — and of course if we did, that would be horror fiction.

Well, it's neat. That's why. Ask any ten-year-old why he likes scary stories, monster-movies, or, for all it may bode ill for the future of our culture, slasher films, and you'll get an answer like that, very basic, very elementary, explaining everything and nothing.

The usual objections from Regular Folks are that stories of ghouls and graves are morbid or unpleasant or even sadistic, since they contain descriptions of people in physically, mentally, or spiritually painful situations. And we're supposed to enjoy this? We must be a bunch of sickos, right?

But all fiction involves situations we wouldn't want to experience ourselves, even the fluffiest situation comedy with its betrayals, embarrassments, pies-in-the-face, and dirty tricks. You and I would prefer a quiet evening at home, or maybe some sight-seeing, but that would make a dull story. A story needs excitement, and excitement is more fun to read about than live through. The characters in *Moby Dick* are not having a good time, and Sam Spade does not enjoy *The Maltese Falcon* after Miles Archer is shot. And, to take an example from a recent television comedy, I doubt Homer Simpson much enjoyed getting lost in the woods without his clothes, being mistaken for Bigfoot and made a fool of in front of his family and neighbors.

One thinks of Valentine Michael Smith's attempt to "grok" Earthly humor: "It hurts," he said.

As someone in *The Lord of the Rings*, either Frodo or Samwise, commented, adventures, which make glorious stories when you relate them later, are "just trouble." Ninety percent of most plots can be boiled down to pain and situations leading up to pain. Indeed, at writing workshops it is commonplace to define the protagonist of the story in terms of "Who hurts?"

So, given that horror fiction, like all others, partakes of pain and trouble, and not necessarily to an inordinate degree, what makes it different from other types of storytelling?

Horror is not quite as elusive as science fiction, for which there are as many definitions as definers. Most modern practioners will agree that it's a matter of mood, not of specific content. A story can be horrific without being supernatural or even fantastic, as much of Edgar Allan Poe readily demonstrates. In the simplest sense, a horror story is one that scares us.

We like to be scared. Trust me. We do. This is the whole secret of storytelling, any sort of storytelling. You would not want to journey through the Mines of Moria or up to the top of Mount Doom, but wasn't Tolkien's description of Sam and Frodo's trouble enjoyable ? Come on. Admit it.

Let me qualify further. "Horror" has been so degraded as a label for violence-pornography movies that the general public thinks that the point of horror fiction (or films) is to be as gross as possible. To which I reply, in the words of (was it M. R. James?), that the idea is to make the hair stand on end, not the gorge rise. If your immediate impulse is to reach for the air-sickness bag, that wasn't a horror story . . . And as far as films go, arguably there have been no real horror films in a long while. Certainly less than one a year for the past twenty years. I have to grasp to come up with any at all . . . *Rosemary's Baby, The Lady in White, Fanny* and *Alexander, Night of the Living Dead* — and, and —? Not many. Huge amounts of gorge-risers, lots of kill-porn, but proper horror films? Very few indeed.

Horror does not require a huge amount of gore, still-steaming viscera, or a motivationless maniac with a knife. In fact, it seldom flourishes under such conditions.

A contemporary distinguished horror writer, Thomas Ligotti, suggests in his book *Songs of a Dead Dreamer* (Carroll & Graf, 1990) that ultimately the tale of terror seeks to be "magic, timeless, and profound."

I would add that such a story deals with dark and, yes, terrifying elements which fascinate and attract, in exactly equal proportion to how much they frighten or repel. If the contents of the story are merely ugly, the reader can so easily put the book down. There has to be something more. Quite often, in the hands of a master such as Arthur Machen, Robert Chambers, or Shirley Jackson, a horror story will strike a note of unearthly beauty at precisely the same moment it strikes terror. So we keep on reading.

The horror is not so much physical pain, or even death, but the inexplicable. The menace is an abnormality, an intrusion into our everyday existence, which by all the rules we hold near and dear, should not be. But there it is. That is the horror of it.

This is so even in such an overtly physical story as Stephen King's "The Raft." In it, several teenagers go back to their summertime vacation site in October for one last dip in the lake. Alas, the lake is now inhabited by a nameless, shapeless, black blot which

traps them on a raft and eats them one after another, even dragging a victim bodily through an inch-wide crack between the boards, mashing him to a pulp in the process. But the story is about how the characters face death, what they (or the readers) learn from the experience. Mere descriptions of people being eaten or terrorized won't do. The point to "The Raft" becomes clear at the end, when the last survivor lets slip his one authentic chance at escape. Just as someone near and dear to our hero is dying hideously, he could get away, if only he were so heartless as to abandon her and strike out for shore while the monster is occupied. But he can't, and as the story ends, the opportunity is gone. That is the horror, that if only he could have found that brutality within himself, he might have made it. Life is not fair. The monster is implacable. The whole situation is a violation — physical, scientific, moral — of the way we think the universe ought to work. But, the story is telling us, the universe never asked our opinion.

H. P. Lovecraft considered horror to be a matter of man against the unknown universe. In his seminal "Supernatural Horror in Literature" he wrote:

"The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and a portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain — a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space."

In other words, the horror story gives us a glimpse of something beyond knowledge and experience. Only in a horror story can we explore the other side of death — what it would mean if the dead returned, or if we could continue to exist, neither dead nor alive, as a vampire. The horror is not so much the physical depredations the monster may inflict, but the implication of the monster being there at all. One more bucket of blood here or there hardly matters, but a convincing sense of unreality, of our conceptual universe coming apart at the seams — that's terrifying.

Even when it's being overtly bloody, the horror story should be subtle, and of course it is not necessary to be bloody. To my mind the best horror novel of recent years was Jonathan Carroll's *The Land of Laughs* (Viking Press, 1980), which I like to describe (half-jokingly, but only half) as "what would have happened if Philip K. Dick and Franz Kafka had collaborated to write L. Frank Baum." There's scarcely a drop of blood in it. Our hero, an admirer of the works of the great (and imaginary) children's author, Marshall France, meets a like-minded heroine and journeys to the midwestern town where France lived his whole, rather short life. After some resistance, he is accepted by the townspeople and France's daughter as the correct person to write the definitive biography of the late, great author. To this point, halfway through the novel, we have a warm, lovely, often slyly funny story about people who love books and strive for art. But the story darkens. It seems that the real purpose of this biography is to bring France back to life, literally, after which point the townspeople (some of whom may be characters imagined by France) plan to murder the biographer and go on forever in a solipsistic dream. The first real stab of horror comes, not when somebody gets disembowelled as they would in the first five minutes of a Friday the 13th movie, but, more than half-way through, when a dog begins to speak. Unreality has begun its invasion. From that point, it never lets up. The hero slides into fantasy, possibly into madness as well, and in the end he has fled to Europe, possible accompanied by his own dead father (a famous movie star), busily killing off agents of Marshall France's reality as they continue to appear. He is trapped. There is no end to this, no way he can return to his normal life. That's horror.

For all its quirks and specialized tropes, the horror story is like any other in the end. It has to have a point, a theme. It is more complicated than a child in a mask jumping out from behind a tree shouting "Boo!"

(Now if it were an adult in the mask shouting "Boo!" you might have a horror story, about the appalling circumstances which have caused this abnormality. Imagine it, a deft mixture of pathos and savagery, as the grown man shouts "Boo!" at first, but then when this isn't enough finds that he must genuinely become a monster, because somehow his twisted psyche demands that there be monsters.)

It has to be about something. But, however abstruse its concepts, such a tale must work on the emotions of the reader. If we can define the horror story at all, it is in terms of its specific emotional impact.

The true horror story requires a sense of evil, not in necessarily a theological sense; but the menaces must be truly menacing, life-destroying, and antithetical to happiness. Where this evil comes from varies with the times. When Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, evil could plausibly come from the Devil, though the Bard was too shrewd an observer of human nature to ignore the fact that the Devil did no more than fan the fires of Macbeth's ambitions. In Poe's time, evil came from within the mind. In Bram Stoker's, it could be an infection, something from far away which polluted the familiar world and irreparably changed innocent people, as Dracula changed Lucy, into something quite different and terrifying. (It would be quite easy to make a case for Dracula as an allegory of Victorian perceptions of syphilis.) In Lovecraft's time, as Einstein and Hubble suddenly revealed a vast and chaotic universe, evil came from outer space, threatening to erase the insignificant flyspeck of mankind without so much as a shrug of a tentacle. Today, a surprising number of horror stories are about the loss of identity. The Invasion of the Body Snatchers is only the most obvious example. We have seen the horrors of totalitarian movements, mind-control cults, and the painful anonymity of life in our cities. Evil can erase us as individuals.

As all stories, the horror story must have characters we care about. This is Stephen King's great strength. His monsters, by and large, are second-rate, strictly off-the-shelf. But he writes so well about suburban teenagers, small town folks, fathers who love their children, broken families trying to cling together, that a vampire or dripping, slobbering Thing intrudes we are caught up emotionally. We are alarmed, scared. He's got us. Clive Barker, on the other hand, is far more inventive, but sometimes suffers from the "lunchmeat syndrome." That is, his characters seem to exist only to be sliced. It's hard to care.

Otherwise, the rules of the horror story are like those of any other sort of fiction: coherence, clean prose, logical consistency, a climax which somehow resolves (or at least alters) the conflict. It's all basic storytelling stuff, which has been with us ever since one of our Paleolithic ancestors got tired of telling about last week's mammoth hunt and started spinning a yarn about the three-headed, ravenous, shambling monstrosity which bites your head off in the dark, but is so subtle that it may have already slipped past you, the audience, and already be waiting inside the cave when you get sleepy and retire to your bearskins . . .

Boo! ❧

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The Question

D.R. Parent

"Were you there, in Nam, I mean?"

"Yeah." The Sergeant looked at the kid in the next seat for the first time. It was a girl this time, probably not eleven years old yet. Even so, he knew where this conversation was headed.

"There's something I've always wanted to ask one of you guys, I know most soldiers don't like to talk about it, but I've just got to know, when you...Well, when you shoot someone, what's it feel like to do that?"

The Sergeant decided to end this in a hurry. "What kind of world was this anyway," he wondered, "when a little girl would ask him something like that."

He put as much surliness into his voice as he could muster and growled, "Look, kid, There ain't no way to answer that. It's something everyone has to learn for themself."

Then he saw the muzzle peeking out from under her jacket. A moment later she had her answer.

Jan didn't like this story. She thought it was simply horrible.

I feel it's realistic – the world is really like this. People do really want to know what the world is like. People who refuse to learn from history are condemned to repeat it. It never pays to be too squeamish to ask what's happening. –MZB

David R. Parent and his pet, Michael Shagnasty McMouse, are co-editors of *Willow World Quarterly* and *Darkweaver Magazine*. Though McMouse is new to the writing field, his partner has been a regular contributor of romance, high fantasy, and horror for the past eight years.

Peak Experience

John Edward Ames

"I first realized what was happening," explained Gareth's 9 A.M. appointment, "when I saw my shadow move while I was standing still. That's a sure sign, you understand."

By now Gareth had heard enough to sense what was coming, despite his ignorance of demonic matters. But he raised his eyebrows as if in polite curiosity, all the same, and watched Dominic Bruno rearrange his hips against the smooth brown leather of the contour chair.

"A sign?"

"Let's not be coy, Doctor. You know perfectly well what I mean—it's a sure sign that...a certain someone is revealing his presence."

Bruno's eyes, hard little peridot disks, challenged Gareth to respond. The elderly client's fawn gabardine suit and lace-up cordovans clashed oddly with the thick silver marcel waves and bland good looks.

Gareth refused to rise to the bait. Instead, he said calmly, "You're firing live ammunition today, I see. Why such hostility since our last meeting?"

"'Hostility'—more of that therapeutic humble pie you made me eat only because you were running the show."

"And now, I take it, I'm not running the show?"

Bruno grinned—a sly, low-lidded grin. "Is Paris a city?"

"Your newfound...confidence is remarkable," said Gareth. "But please excuse me if I'm skeptical of its emotional validity. Three days ago you sat there in the throes of an anxiety attack, claiming..."

He consulted a flip-back notepad on the desk. "Claiming that Satan was testing you with 'the thought that won't go away.'"

"Somebody tested me," insisted Bruno, refusing to use the name. "But I've stopped whining since I passed the test."

"Congratulations. But before we explore that, I'm still curious about this intriguing thought that won't go away—you never did explain exactly what that thought was."

The retrograde question clearly did not interest Bruno. His bored, greenish-yellow eyes scanned the upbeat decor of the office, bright with gay majolica jars and gold-framed lithographs of the 1890s "Gibson girls."

"As I've already clearly explained," he said archly, "it was not a thought, per se. Neither was it the typical schizophrenic voice you skull jockeys stir up such a brouhaha over. It was...an awareness. Simply an awareness that grew stronger in proportion as I tried not to be aware of it. But as I said, it was only an endurance test—one which I passed."

"And now you believe that Satan has found you suitable and taken up residence inside you?"

Bruno smiled so proudly that Gareth half-expected his client to offer him a cigar and boast, "It's a boy!"

"Hate to rain on your parade, old sock, but I don't believe it," Gareth went on firmly. "It is impressive, though, the number of counterfeit ideas that an active imagination will coin to protect the Ego."

Bruno's eyes cut suddenly from the litho behind Gareth's desk and bored directly into his mild gaze. "And modern psychology is the biggest lie since Simon Peter denied what's-his-name."

"Perhaps," Gareth conceded with a wan smile. "But denying your problem with this obsessive thought is a kind of lie, too. And now that lie has driven you to this latest extreme of—"

"You headshrinkers," Bruno interrupted wearily, "are nothing but advice-column Pollyannas and boring milksops. How do such sedentary little girly-men like you justify ninety dollars an hour? We come to you in quest of a lodestar, and you give us cracker-barrel philosophy!"

Gareth seldom blushed, but now he felt the blood rush to his face so fast it made his earlobes glow warm. He glanced at the ormolu clock on his desk and tried not to sound visibly relieved when he said, "We can't explore that charge today, I'm afraid—time's up. Why don't we pick all this up on Friday?"

Bruno's TV announcer face went blank with genuine surprise. There was a soft zippering noise as he sat up in the chair. "You still don't believe me, do you?" he said incredulously.

"I'm...intrigued," admitted the psychologist. "That's about all, though. Sorry. You're right—I'm boring. In Piaget's terms, I'm locked in the concrete-operational stage."

"But what do you expect? Against my better judgment, I actually like you and hoped you might be smart enough to see how the wind sets. What, must I revile your mother in a voice like 80-grit sandpaper or reveal a '666' tattooed on my scalp—or perhaps you will believe only after I vomit thirty gallons of green latex paint all over you?"

"No thanks, sounds messy. Would 9 A.M. be all right again for Friday?" hinted Gareth, the tip of an onyx pen poised over his appointment pad.

Bruno shook his head slowly, sadly. "You're going to need just a touch," he said almost fondly. "One quick little lick."

Physically speaking, Gareth would realize much later, the next few micromoments were next to nothing—as subtle, and even as vaguely pleasant, as a faint flickering of sexual response. A cool little squiggle of current moved up his spine, and he felt his blood lightly carbonate.

As for the rest of it...he experienced no noxious foetor, no sudden dip in the temperature, no Spielbergian blitzkrieg of nightmare images. Whatever touched him briefly was more private and terrifying than that, more intimate and also more destructive: one moment he believed in love and hope and pity and compassion; the next moment all such notions were dead flies on a window sill. It was that quiet and that awful and that quick. Then, mercifully, he was "himself" again, though with a neon memory trace burned into his psyche for life.

"9 A.M. Friday," confirmed Bruno cheerfully, swinging his legs out of the chair.

Gareth only nodded wordlessly as he watched his client leave. Then he canceled the rest of that day's appointments and went home early to monitor his shadow. ❧

John E. Ames : In addition to three horror novels (THE FORCE, SPELLCASTER, and DEATH CRYSTAL), I've published tales of terror/df in DOPPELGANGER, THIN ICE, CHIC, CAVALIER, COLORADO-NORTH REVIEW, and THE PENNY DREADFUL. My nonfiction articles on the field have appeared in THE WRITER, THE 1990 WRITER'S HANDBOOK, THE FINAL DRAFT and elsewhere. I'm a former college instructor who's taught at the University of New Mexico, the U. of Northern Colorado, and Eastern Michigan University. I spent three years right after high school in the Marine Corps as a correspondent, including a stint in Asia as a stringer for the PACIFIC STARS AND STRIPES. My interests include the American Southwest, Mexico and the Mexican people, abnormal psychology, and the martial arts.

Hello Daddy, This is Margaret

Marion Zimmer Bradley

This story was written as an audition (for my daughter Moira), for a drama class. Some readers will call it fantasy – but as every parent of teenagers knows, it's really horror...MZB

"Hello, Daddy, this is Margaret...what do you *mean* I haven't called you for a long time? I called you in October! Well, that's only eight months, after all...sure, school is fine, anyway it was before I quit...

...why, of *course* I told you when I quit, didn't I? They didn't even make me pay for those broken windows...

...oh, there were only nine of them...well, not counting the one in the Dean's office, and everything is fine, there isn't even going to be a scar...well, just a little one, that's all, just on my forehead, not where if *matters* or anything...

...no, of *course* I wasn't drunk, Daddy, I mean, who ever got drunk on just three bottles of gin between four of us?...

...Daddy, listen, everything's *fine*. honest, I didn't even lose...no, Daddy, everything's *fine*, I mean, Tim's out of jail and everything, and I heard from him in Canada just last month, well, maybe it was three months...

...Daddy, will you stop *worrying*? Everything's *fine*, I mean, no, of course I'm not living in that commune any more, I mean how *could* I...well, Beth and Anna, their husbands came and made such a stupid fuss, and they took the kids away...

...oh, *nothing*, Daddy, there weren't any rats there at all, it was just that when the Health Inspectors found...

...Daddy, will you let me finish just one sentence, *please*? No, of *course* there weren't rats bothering the baby, it was the *dog* the rats got to, it was just that they found the dog chewing on the baby's ...

...No, Daddy, on the baby's *bottle*! Anyhow, it was just a *little* dog, he didn't hurt the health inspector *at all*, he's getting out of the hospital just next month...he only broke *one* leg, and it was his own fault, Curly wouldn't *really* have shot him...

...Daddy, will you be reasonable, and not use *language* like that? They're *nice* people, they're my *friends*! No, the leader of the commune was not in jail, only just overnight after the protest march ... what do you *mean*, what protest march? Don't you *ever* watch television? I'll never understand you and Mommy, you don't even *care* what's going on in the world, and honestly, the midwife in the jail was *awfully* nice to me, and she said she'd never seen such beautiful twins...

...listen, Daddy, I told you, everything's *fine*, my leg's out of the cast by now...

...Daddy, *Daddy*?...what do you *mean* I never tell you anything. Daddy...? (*long beat*)...operator ...*OPERATOR?* ❧

Flowers

Kit Westler

"What an odd way to die," said Percy, absently stroking his jet-black moustache.

"Seems to work as well as any, sir," said Cringer.

"You say the flowers killed him?" Lord Zangor Percy asked again, as if simply making sure of a fact.

"Yes, milord," Cringer asserted, a bit nervously.

"How very odd," Percy said reflectively.

"Yes, sir," said Cringer with feeling.

"Yet they look no more deadly than any other flowers I've seen," Percy remarked, glancing about him.

Cringer said nothing, only played uneasily with his swordhilt.

"Well, Cringer, you see them. All around us. I must admit that they are all of the same height, which is odd, but otherwise this is like any other flower-filled meadow you'll find in this country. Rather pretty," he added thoughtfully. "Eh, Cringer?"

"They killed him, sir," Cringer said obstinately. "He walked out to the middle, sir—the men watched him. Then suddenly he fell, sir, and when they got here he was gone."

"You are sure he is not playing a prank?" Percy questioned. "—Crawled away, or something?"

"No, sir," Cringer replied with certainty. "You can see, sir, that the flowers are only knee high; the men could have seen him crawl away."

"Odd," said Percy.

"If you please, sir," said Cringer, showing too much white in his eyes, "I wish we could go back, sir, out of the meadow."

"Whatever for?" Percy asked. "Are the flowers after you, too?"

"Well, sir," Cringer said, "I just feel rather conspicuous out here in the middle of the field, sir; too easily seen. This is a strange land, sir, and we know not what may be in it. I would feel safer out of the meadow." He shuffled his feet uncomfortably; his hand was clamped tightly on the hilt of his rapier. "Besides, you know the natives told us that this field was dangerous. They never come past the edge of the trees."

"Oh, bosh, Cringer," Percy exclaimed testily. "You are nervous today."

Cringer did not answer. He was staring around them, at the gently waving flowers. His eyes were wide and moved quickly.

"Look at this one, Cringer," Percy said. "This blue flower here. I have never seen one quite like it. Quite pretty, I should say, eh, Cringer?" He paused, leaning over it. "What is it, do you know?...Cringer...Cringer?" He straightened up, and looked around. "Cringer?"

But all he could see were the gently waving flowers, all around him. Cringer seemed to be gone.

"How very odd," said Percy, reflectively. ❧

The Doll Collector

Anne M. Valley

Mae Woods set the latest addition to her collection – a doll resembling an infant -- on the bed. A tag with the doll read: *Handcrafted by Margery Wisham. May all your wishes come true.* Mae's wishes for herself were modest, but she hoped her son, Tim, would be accepted by the Ivy League University to which he had applied.

She went to the door and picked up the newspaper, turning to the horoscope. Mae didn't believe destiny was ruled by the stars but read the column out of curiosity. Her sun sign for the next day read: *An unusual person will bring you good luck, but the cost will be high.* Mae smiled. Who'd believe such trash? But there were people who believed everything the tabloids printed.

After reading the paper, she made supper for herself. Tim, a summer-camp counselor, was away for six weeks.

As she prepared for bed, Mae felt she was being watched. The eyes of her new doll were the only other eyes in the room. But dolls couldn't see. She shrugged off her uneasiness.

The next morning as she was leaving for work, she heard a noise and turned around. A preternatural light blinded her. When she blinked again, a beautiful woman, holding an infant, appeared. She wore a white silk robe.

"Who are you?" Mae asked. "Where did you come from?"

"I am Queen Flavia of Oromis, a fairy kingdom not of this plane."

I must be hallucinating, Mae thought.

The fairy levitated. "I called you to buy Margery Wisham's doll, yesterday. She is my ally on this plane."

"I bought the doll because I wanted it."

"Margery is half fairy, a mortal sorceress as you would say. We cast a spell which made you desire the doll."

"Why?"

"The fairy kingdoms are at war. There are those who would seek my son's downfall. You must take Prince Harmon, my son, and care for him until the war is over."

Mae looked startled. "If you're a fairy queen and your son is immortal..."

"My enemies could change him into a mortal with their spells."

"But how will I explain this to my son?"

"I will put Prince Harmon's soul into the doll. No one need know. Bathe the doll and put sugared milk and bread out for him to eat. You'll be richly blessed. At a future date, I will come for my son."

A feeling of dread came over Mae. There was something she wanted to remember. "What if I don't agree to your request?"

"I will curse you and your son."

Mae agreed -- not for herself but for Tim.

The queen recited an incantation and waved her hand. The infant in her arms disappeared. Mae looked at the doll. Could this possibly be Prince Harmon? She turned to speak to the fairy, but she was gone.

Mae put sugared milk and bread on the dresser and left for work, but she couldn't keep her mind on her job. She was sure she had imagined the whole episode. She hurried home from the office, expecting to find the milk and bread still there. She unlocked the front door and went straight to the bedroom. The food was gone from the dresser. There was only an empty glass and a plate wih crumbs.

Mae's feeling of dread returned. If anything happened to the fairy prince, she would be cursed -- and Tim! But what could happen? Fire. She would quit smoking. She would put all new batteries in the smoke alarms. What if Prince Harmon were kidnapped? She must install a burglar alarm. Frightened, she picked up the doll and bathed it. Then she settled in the rocking chair, singing a lullaby to the fairy prince.

Tim had been accepted by the college of his choice and Mae had gotten a raise. She now believed Queen Flavia was her friend and their good fortune was the result of the fairy's intervention. Still Mae worried about fire and often left for work only to return and check the burners on the stove.

One morning as Mae bathed Prince Harmon, the phone rang. She lifted the doll which she had just soaped, intending to wrap him in a towel. The soap made the doll slippery and he fell from her grasp. Mae screamed. There was a red gash across the doll's forehead.

The phone stopped ringing. Queen Flavia appeared. "You have destroyed my son's body. Now I must take your son's body to replace it."

"No!" Mae shouted. "Please! Anything but that.! She remembered the horoscope. It had warned her. "I'll do anything if you'll spare Tim," she said,

"Very well. If I don't take your son's body, I must have your body to house Harmon's soul."

Speechless, Mae nodded.

On the front page of the Herald-Star, this story appeared: *Police are baffled by the disappearance of Mae Woods.* Nothing in the home was disturbed. Her son, Tim, said none of his mother's doll collection was missing. He was puzzled by an infant doll he hadn't seen before, lying on the floor with a red streak across the forehead.❧

Anne Valley

My fantasy credits are: RENAISSANCE FAN (a poem), SEARCHING SOULS a poem forthcoming (reprint rights) and a short-short OF KING AND TIME July of '90 Pablo Lennis.

I am single (no kids or pets) and unlike most writers never held a real job not counting college.

In the past I have worked for a presidential candidate in '84. Until a couple of years ago I was an officer of THE TOASTMASTERS (local). I am lector at my church. I am one of Piers Anthony's regular pen pals and his advice has been invaluable. A hobby I recently started is collecting vintage SF magazines. As for my story, I am a former doll collector. I also believe in astrology.

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A Mirror for Heaven

Johnathan Lethem

Come here, my son. Did I ever tell you of the time, long ago, when Pawker Slicey protected our land from the meddling of the Gods with his mirror for Heaven?

I was a roofsmith that year, and Pawker called on those of our guild to join him in the city square to assist as he and his drones unfurled the gigantic mirror. Pawker stood in the center of the square, booming instructions through a megaphone, while his bumbling drones clambered over the rooftops to unwind the tremendous sheet of foil. Dreading damage to our eaves and gutterpipes, we scurried up after the lead-footed drones, barking reprimands hopelessly. The drones who stopped to listen were the ones who were successful in their labors until the shouting started, while the ones who were making a mess of it pressed on, ignoring us. Oh, the chaos of that day! Nonetheless, Pawker succeeded before sunset in draping our entire village in the shadow of his fantastic mirror.

He bade the mayor to call a meeting that night, and all the townspeople convened to hear his explanation.

"We live our lives under the constraint of manipulations from the heavens," Pawker declared, "prisoners of the expectations of the Gods. We want to live out our simple, humble lives; the Gods wish us to become Good. They seek to see in us reflections of themselves, they prod at us to become more Godly. Now, when they gaze down, they will finally be satisfied. And we, living under the protection of my mirror, will finally be free."

So it was that the Gods were fooled, and we were freed of their manipulations.

Then came a very strange time. I recall it as I recall a drunken revel; in fragments that glint from within a concealing mist. I quit my work on the roofs, as did all my fellows, and we spent our nights in the taverns and dancing halls, waking as often in the bushes with a lady as in our own beds. (Did I ever tell you of the night of your conception? Ah, well, when you're older, perhaps.) Anyway, I was not alone; the streets of our town babbled beneath the vast shadow of Pawker's mirror with the laughter of those who had thrown aside the yoke of their worldly concerns for the intoxicants of lovemaking, wagering, and drink. I recall festivals, orgies, and theater, and I recall very little that did not seem to be some part of each. And I recall also the sight of Pawker Slicey wandering through the morning mists, his expression grim as he evaluated the result of his works.

A few weeks later Pawker roused his slumbering thralls and called the able-bodied of the town together to announce his next adjustment: a mirror for Hell.

"The devils who live below us," he explained, "seek to alter our behavior so it more resembles their own. The Gods' influence having been dispelled, it is only logical that the devils have recently succeeded; they must gaze upward now with almost total satisfaction! For that reason, another mirror has become necessary. Those human vessels still containing a shred of selfhood are hereby called upon to assist in this venture."

Pawker's thralls at that moment dragged into the square another roll of reflective foil to match the one above our heads. Sobered by regret, we set about paving our streets and carpeting our floors with this new mirror. The clumsy among us managed to catch the foil on rocks and twigs, tearing it in places, and one of Pawker's still-sleepy thralls contrived somehow to be trapped underneath, yet as the sun set that night, we were protected by mirrors above and below. The devils would be satisfied that all above was devilish, and we would be free.

But I am sorry to say it was only the beginning —

What is it, my son? You wish to know why I'm telling you this tale yet again?

Oh, why won't you take your mirror gear off, just for a moment, and let me see how you've grown! ❧

Jonathan Lethem :
I've sold short fiction to *Universe, Pulphouse, Aboriginal, New Pathways* and *Journal Wired*. My short story "Waiting Under Water" is being adapted for independent television by Mercury/LaLaBlaBla Productions. I write lyrics for the rock bands Edo and Two Fettered Apes. I work as a bookseller at Moe's Books in Berkeley.

The Female of the Species

Sandra C. Morrese

The band of men descended on the quiet settlement like a desert storm — sudden and devastating. Their fierce battlecries thundering through the cool morning air, shattering its illusion of peace. The bandits met no resistance, not even a guard. They dismounted, weapons in hand, and scattered to invade and ransack the tents.

Hakeim, the bandit leader, headed for the large center tent that was used as court. He entered cautiously, sword raised, until he saw the tent's inhabitants. Several dozen women, huddled together in fear, in its center. He smiled in lustful appreciation of the selection. His men would praise him tonight indeed!

His lieutenant entered a moment later. "Sir, the settlement is abandoned. No one save these;" he indicated the women, "we've met no resistance. And apparently, many items are missing. We will do well here, but not as well as we could have."

Hakeim dismissed the lieutenant.

"Where is your King? Your warriors? Not even an old man is to be found!" he demanded.

A strikingly beautiful and bejeweled woman in flowing crimson silk walked steadily toward the bandit, then knelt before him. She covered her face with her hands, bowing to the floor in obeisance, her long black hair spilling over his sandaled feet. After a moment she came up to sit on her heels, hands on her knees, her eyes lowered.

"They are gone, my lord. When they saw your band coming, knowing the fearsome reputation of the Great Bandit Hakeim Labahn, they took themselves away with whatever they could carry. I am Talina, Queen of the Natani Tribe. I and my women were left here as a gift to appease you that you might choose to let the rest of the tribe go. We beg only kind treatment from your noble band." She raised her eyes at the last to meet his with a decidedly sensual eloquence. "Natani women know how to please men."

Hakeim felt unbidden heat rise within him. Yes, all the desert knew the reputation of the women of Natani, just as all knew his reputation for ruthlessness.

He knew also the cowardly reputation of Natani men. Her story was not implausible. Evidence held to it, even that his far riders had seen a large band leave the settlement yesterday. One of the reasons he'd attacked when he did — less resistance; but *no* resistance?

"As Queen," she continued, her searching gaze boring relentlessly into him, "may I exercise my right to choose the Great Bandit Leader for myself?"

His smile was answer enough.

"I have thirty men who will be very pleased by your...offer." He put out a hand to help her rise.

"My women number thirty-six, some of your men will be doubly grateful. Choose carefully those with the stamina for such a gift."

By nightfall the tents were filled again, but with bandits led by the ladies of their choice. Talina took Hakeim into her own bedchamber. He pulled her roughly to him and kissed her soundly, a kiss she returned with passion while her hands suggestively caressed his neck and back. Then she pulled away.

"Would you have me so quick when I can make your pleasure last for hours?" she asked enticingly.

Her cool, smooth voice spoke volumes to the enthralled bandit leader. She started to undress him, slowly and with great deliberation, then paused at his swordbelt.

He removed it for her and placed it next to the bed, then ran his hand over her shoulder, pulling down the silk to reveal her breast. She moved deftly away, giving him her most seductive look yet.

"In time," she smiled, and drew him to lie on the bed.

Never had he felt such ecstasy as her ministrations brought. Groaning with pleasure, he closed his eyes, not seeing the hand that reached beneath the crimson silk. Then his eyes popped open as the gentle caress became a painful vice grip, and he felt cold, sharp steel press against the all too tender flesh of his manhood. The slightest movement and he'd be a eunuch.

"I trust you're not foolish enough to cry out?" The silken voice was now hard ice.

He gaped at her, fighting his sudden and total terror of what she might do. She smiled.

"I wonder how many of your victims have felt the same helpless fear," she mused. "Now the conqueror becomes the captive."

A few moments later the drapes parted and two women entered, blue and violet silks spattered with blood that was clearly not their own. He noticed the one in blue carried his lieutenant's blade. They strode purposefully to the side of the bed, the violet one picking up Hakeim's sword. Drawing it from the scabbard, she placed the tip to his throat. Only then did Talina release his hostaged manhood.

The one in blue bowed slightly. "The rest of his men are dispatched, my Queen. As you thought, they became complacent in their eagerness to bed us."

Talina nodded. "Good. The bodies can be piled on the west ridge and burned at sunrise when the winds will carry away the stench. That will signal the tribe that it is safe to return."

"You *planned* this?" Hakeim finally blurted out.

"But of course," Talina responded.

"Your men have no honor?" he spat, "they let their women do their fighting for them!"

Talina chucked at his attempted insult."We are a practical people, lord bandit. Had our warriors engaged you head-on, lives might have been lost, Natani blood spilled. We found that unacceptable. This way, our only loss is a few blood-soiled linens. Your reputation *did* precede you, and your weaknesses were obvious. Does not a good warrior sensibly use his enemy's weakness against him? There is no dishonor in being sensible."

"Take him into the courtyard," she instructed her women. "Or better yet, walk him to the west ridge, then we won't have to carry his body."

As they left, Talina considered the brigand's utter shock. She thought everyone knew — as with most species, the female human is far deadlier than the male. ❧

Sandra C. Morrese: I'm 30 years old, married to an Air Force captain, we have one 4-year-old daughter and a son due in September. I'm temporarily living in south central Missouri with the aforementioned plus two dogs and one cat. This is my second professional sale (yeah!)—my first being in *Four Moons of Darkover*, and I keep plugging away at it. I consider writing to be my career. I'm also very involved in fandom. I edit and publish a C. J. Cherryh fanzine, *Shon'ai*, for the Cherryh's Khemeis fan group; I'm also active in the National Fantasy Fan Federation as a director, bureau head for publicity and round robin coordinator. As a hobby, I do ceramics, some of which I take to conventions. I also read avidly and my husband says you could drop a bomb next to me when my nose is in a book and I'd never notice. He's probably right.

The Lesser Twin

Elisabeth Waters

Kiara was just coming upstairs to wash the hall floor when she heard her sister start screaming. For an instant she froze, standing there with the bucket of water in her hand. The wizard Tarnor's instructions, as relayed by Karina, had been clear: they would be working in his temple all afternoon and were not to be disturbed for anything.

"As if I'd want to disturb them," Kiara had thought in disgust. She and Karina were twins, and they loved each other, but they were not at all alike. Karina was the elder and the beautiful one, with pale clear skin and glossy black hair that fell to her hips, while Kiara had skin that turned into a splotchy mass of freckles the minute the sun hit it and an unruly mass of very curly red-orange hair. She'd given up on both skin and hair long ago, so her complexion was now almost uniformly brown and her hair, as short as she could persuade Karina to chop it off, stuck out in random directions. The twins also differed in their approach to life: Karina flitted effortlessly from enthusiasm to enthusiasm (and from man to man), while Kiara followed quietly in her wake, picking up the pieces and trying to lend a bit of stability to their vagrant existence.

She'd be glad when Karina got over this craziness. Tarnor had met Karina eight months ago, when she was living with a wealthy and generous merchant, a middle-aged widower with two small sons. Kiara had lived with them and helped look after the children, and she still missed them. But Karina had been getting restless and had been easy prey for Tarnor's offer to make her his priestess and a great sorceress. So they had moved into Tarnor's tower: Karina to share his bed and study and Kiara to run the place and feed them at the irregular intervals at which they surfaced. From the variety of different tastes showing in the decor of the place, Kiara suspected that they were only the last in a long series of "priestesses". Fortunately Tarnor didn't seem to notice her much, which was fine with her --- Karina could have him, whyever she wanted him.

But she was not going to stand by and see her sister hurt if there was anything she could do to prevent it, and there was both terror and pain in those screams. She hurried down the short stone corridor which separated the temple from the living quarters, shoved open the heavy wooden door with her shoulder and pushed her way in. A sword, which had apparently been leaning against the door, clattered at her feet, but she stepped over it without seeing it, her attention focused on her sister.

Karina had good reason to be screaming; she appeared to be holding a ball of flame, unable to release it. As Kiara watched in horror, a clump of Karina's hair, tossed about by her struggles, fell across her hands and flared up as well. Kiara stepped forward and swung the bucket she held; the water arced neatly across the space between them and drenched Karina from eyebrows to knees. The flames went out instantly, with a horrible sizzling noise, which was almost drowned out by Tarnor's yelling in her ear as he grabbed her shoulders from behind.

"You stupid wench! How dare you cross by Wards and profane my Temple! Do you have the slightest idea what you have done?"

Kiara swung an elbow into his fat stomach, broke free, and ran to Karina, who stood unmoving, staring in horror and revulsion at something at her feet. "I think you killed it . . . "

Kiara dropped to her knees, wincing slightly as they hit the hard stone floor. 'It' was a small amphibian-like creature, a dark muddy-brown-grey-black , which appeared to be slowly melting onto the floor. She scooped it up into her apron with one hand, grabbed Karina by the upper arm with the other, and towed her toward the kitchen. "You need burn ointment for your hands. What is this thing, anyway?"

"Salamander," Karina replied faintly, staring blankly ahead of her.

"Oh, Holy Mother," Kiara realized in dismay,"she's going into shock." She hastily dragged Karina to the kitchen and shoved her into a horizontal position on the bench next to the fire. The salamander still lay inert in her apron, but she had the feeling it was not quite dead. It was there , in a way that dead things weren't. She untied her apron and lowered it carefully in the fire, putting the salamander into the center of the flames. It was the only thing she could think of to do for it, and maybe it would work. Then she turned away to wrap a blanket around Karina and break off a piece of the plant she used for scrapes and burns. She was carefully squeezing sap over the burned areas on her

sister's hands when Tarnor limped wheezing into the kitchen.

"Fine priestess you are," he snarled at Karina,"panicking over a little thing like that. How do you expect to get anywhere without learning to embrace the pain? Don't you know that the universe is pain?"

"Save your breath!" Kiara snapped at him. "She can't hear you anyway. And your universe may be pain, but mine certainly isn't --- and I don't think that Karina's crazy enough to want hers to be."

"She wants what I want." To Tarnor this was obviously Natural Law. "And as for your universe . . ." His foot lashed out suddenly, caught her hip, and propelled her into the fire. Dimly she heard him continue ". . . that can be changed."

The flames hurt excruciatingly for a moment, then all sensation went away. "I must be dying," Kiara thought, vaguely remembering hearing that dying of burns didn't hurt once the shock hit. Then there was pain again, sharp teeth digging into the side of her neck. "I must have landed on the salamander. Poor creature, what a day it's having."

"Verily," the salamander agreed. "But yours isn't going very smoothly either."

Startled, Kiara twisted her head and opened her eyes. The salamander was next to her, filling most of her field of vision. The only other thing she could see was fire. "Is it because I'm dead that we can hear each other?"

"No." The salamander stretched out all four legs, neck and tail, obviously reveling in the fire which ran along its body, now a glowing red-orange. "It's because we're in Fire. Earth, Water, and Air transmit sound; Fire transmits energy."

Kiara thought about that for a moment. "And emotion is a form of energy, and since ideas can be expressed in either words or emotions . . ."

". . . they can be transferred through any of the Elements," the salamander finished for her. "Exactly. Besides, you're not dead."

"I'm not?" Kiara looked down at herself. Her body was the same glowing red-orange as the salamander's, with the same four short legs. She stretched and twisted her head further around to regard her long tapering tail in disbelief. "Holy Mother of All Living Things!" She went limp again, and discovered that she was floating comfortably in the middle of the fire. It did feel good, but it was going to require a little mental adjustment --- to say the least.

"You didn't land on me," the salamander was explaining,"I bit you to transform you --- not that I think you couldn't have done it on your own eventually --- since the fire didn't kill you, you obviously have magic, but I wanted to get us out of here before that wretched wizard notices and constrains us."

"You mean he hasn't noticed my turning into a salamander? I admit he tends to ignore me, but that seems rather a lot to ignore!"

"I don't feel him noticing us, but let's get out of here before he does!"

"But my sister . . ."

"What can you do for her in this form? Her stupid phobia of salamanders is what got us in this mess --- if you can remember that far back!" The salamander was thoroughly impatient. "You can't help her now, and if we don't get out of here you'll never be able to. Come!" It disappeared from view, but Kiara could feel a faint tugging. She followed it.

Kiara spent a period of time (she had no idea how long --- salamanders didn't reckon time the way people did) learning how to be a salamander. What salamanders did, apparently, was to understand Fire, to celebrate it, to embody it. In a curious way salamanders were Fire and Fire was salamander --- at least that was as close as she could come to putting it in words. She learned to move through Fire and to go from the Fire to individual fires in the realms of men.

Occasionally she would be summoned, not by name, but simply as the nearest salamander, by some magician in need of extra heat or illumination, but such terms of service were fixed and short. Apparently there was some sort of Law governing such things, not that it was ever written out or put into words, but some things made sense and worked in practice and others did not. She realized that this was what had been working in her when she put the salamander in the fire --- it had made sense to her, and she had done it.

Being curious about these matters, she took to hanging around where she would be the one called, and began her somewhat informal study of magic --- looking over the shoulders of her unknowing teachers. She discovered that while users of magic came in many varieties, there were two basic flavors --- those who used magic as a celebration of the beauty of creation, and those who used it for their own selfish ends.

She had two personal favorites, both of the first sort: a man who had the most cluttered workroom she had ever seen (or ever expected to see), but always seemed to have exactly the book she needed to read spread open below her, and a woman who always dismissed her with ". . . my thanks for your aid, Essence of Fire." It was comforting to be noticed, even if not named, for being a salamander was lonely for a human --- salamanders didn't care about individuality. As a person she had been unique, even as "Karina's ugly twin sister" she was an individual, but as a salamander, she was just a salamander like every other salamander.

Then a summons came, and she discovered to her horror that she was in Tarnor's temple. He didn't notice her, of course; to him she was just a source of light ---- though she doubted that he needed light for what he and his "priestess" were doing on the black draped high couch he called an altar. But the girl was not Karina --- she was younger and blonde.

"Where is Karina --- what happened to her --- how long have I been a salamander?!?" Kiara hovered in the corner, grimly lighting the ritual (though the amount of power she perceived in it was minimal), and thinking furiously. There wasn't much else she could do at the moment, but she resolved that as soon as she was dismissed she would slip down to the kitchen fire and start searching the place --- even if she had to be a flame on every candle in the entire tower.

But she wasn't dismissed. Instead of completing the ritual with the proper dismissals and banishings, Tarnor fell asleep on the altar. The blonde sighed, slipped quietly away from him, and went to the edge of the circle where the sword lay. She picked it up and ran it widdershins around the edge of the circle to make a gap she could pass through, then left the room, leaving the gap in the circle. Kiara, shaking her

head at such carelessness, followed her.

The blonde went to the kitchen, where, to Kiara's immense relief, Karina was carving a roast. She looked tired and cross, but at least she was alive and well --- even the burns on her hands had healed.

"No rush on dinner," the blonde said, grabbing a slice of meat and chewing on it. "He's asleep."

Karina looked up, saw Kiara, and let out a loud scream. The blonde put a quick hand across her mouth. "Hush! You'll wake the Master." Then she turned to see what Karina was staring at with such terror. "Oh, damn. He forgot to dismiss the salamander --- but how did it get across the wards?"

Something snapped in Kiara; she thought it must be her temper. While she had been a salamander nothing had touched her nearly enough to get her angry, but this was her sister, her other self, reduced to a servant for Tarnor and his incompetent new mistress. She transformed to human form, retaining enough fire about her to substitute for the clothes that had burned away that day in the kitchen fire. The stone floor was very cold under her feet. "You opened the circle, fool, --- and left it open! Doesn't Tarnor train his "priestesses" at all?"

"Of course he does!" the blonde replied indignantly. "He's a great wizard!"

"Not as great a wizard as you are a fool --- both of you!" She slapped the girl's hand away from Karina's mouth. "Being good in bed is not the major qualification for a priestess." Her old clothes chest still sat in the corner, and she grabbed the first dress to hand, doused the rest of her fire, and hastily dressed, hoping not to freeze to death in the process.

"And I suppose that being a good housekeeper is?" Karina, apparently unable to cope with questions like "why were you a salamander?" was falling back on their old sibling rivalry. "You're always right, always perfect --- but you can't even get a man!"

"Why would I want to --- you've always had plenty for both of us!" Kiara snapped back and looked at her sister critically. "But you won't be able to much longer if you hang around here being a drudge --- already your hands are rough, and your hair looks dreadful, when did you last brush it?"

Karina burst into tears, the blonde stared from one to the other in total incomprehension, and Tarnor limped heavily into the room.

"What's this noise? I told both of you that I expect my priestesses to get along with one another --- how am I supposed to do Great Magick with the pair of you acting like common scolds? Magick requires sacrifice, concentration, and discipline."

"None of which you possess," Kiara said coldly, drawing herself to her full height and slowly advancing on him. "You're not fit to scrub a hearth-witch's cauldron."

"I don't know who you are, girl, or what you're doing in my Tower, but obviously you know nothing of Magick." Tarnor's voice was low and sonorous, but to Kiara he was so obviously bluffing that she couldn't understand why the other girls couldn't hear it.

She didn't bother to answer in words; she simply stretched both arms out at shoulder height pointing toward him. She noticed that they were pale and smooth (being a salamander seemed to have done wonders for her complexion), before she started the flames running down them and shooting out from her fingertips. It was a ridiculously simple trick, using virtually no energy, and not dangerous to anyone in the room; but it had most satisfying results. Tarnor fled screaming, the blonde sank to her knees in a small cowering heap, and Karina fainted.

Kiara lowered her arms, stopping the flames, stepped over her sister's body, and began to pack her clothes. After a moment Karina moaned softly, and the blonde, with a fearful glance at Kiara, fled the room. Kiara finished packing her things, then turned to her sister.

"I'm leaving this place, Karina. If you care to accompany, pack your things."

"But Tarnor ---"

"He's not going to stop us," Kiara pointed out.

"But I can't abandon him! He needs me to save him."

"Save him from what?" Kiara inquired. "That blonde girl, or his own incompetence?"

"You don't understand," Karina said. "He's really a good person underneath, but he needs my love to manifest it."

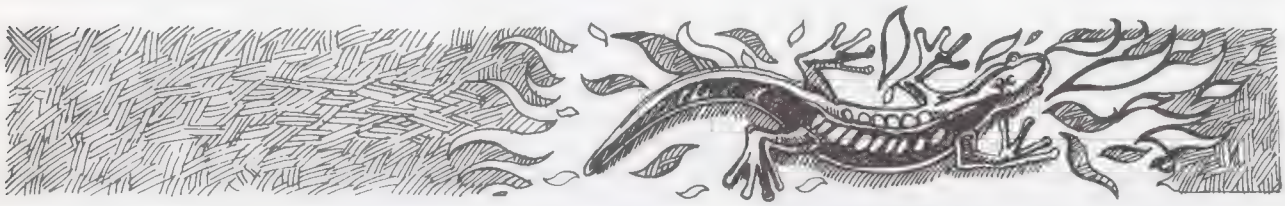
"Oh, I think I understand," Kiara said slowly. "You think that if you love him enough and stick with him, you can change him into what you think he should be. Just as I always thought that if I stuck with you long enough, you'd turn out like me."

"But I am like you, aren't I? We're twins."

"Yes, but I don't know that we're any more alike in essence than we are in looks," Kiara shrugged. "In any case, I'm going. If you want to come with me, come. If you want to stay here, stay."

"I can't leave him," Karina repeated.

"Then stay with him." Kiara sighed and picked up her pack. "Be happy, Karina." She hugged her sister, then turned and walked out the door, no longer half of a pair of twins, but an individual in her own right.❧



The Attraction of Fantasy

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

The attraction of fantasy - as I may have said ten thousand times since starting this magazine - is the workout it gives the human imagination.

It doesn't have to be horror: as I just told my co-editor Jan, the important thing isn't that a vampire can bite off your head; it's that the vampire (for which, read ghost, werewolf, etc) - exists at all. That taken for granted, all else follows.

This is why I feel so strongly that science fiction, horror, etc., are just special cases of fantasy. To a person with a strong well-developed sense of fantasy, all else follows.

Or, as Sally Gearhart said: before anything - from a radio to a talking cow - can happen, someone has to imagine it first.

In English literature (I couldn't say about that of the continent) what we now call Science Fiction started circa 1835 with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein - The New Adam*. This was the story of the original Frankstein - not the movie monster but the original monster,– in the true sense of the word *monster,* which means *something truly unusual.* The original Frankenstein's monster was really beautiful - and those of you who have seen Mr. Karloff's movie version can attest that although there are many words to describe his monster, beautiful is not the first word that springs to mind.

In about 1750, average people began to be encouraged to look, question, and explore things for themselves. Before this, most religions wanted people not to think for themselves, but to accept a received view of the world. This era of enlightenment was the greatest revolution in history. Freedom of the human imagination. If you are using your mind to imagine things, you're doing the same thing God does - so to imagine anything is to share in the work of God - creating. And that is true even if the only thing you create is a pattern for a necktie.

My first story came to me one day while I was riding past migrant labor barracks in Texas, in the mid 1950's. I looked over to a barracks where the people were housed. The conditions of the migrant workers were unbelievable. My father, who was not a kind man, would not have housed pigs - let alone horses - like that. I thought to myself, "Hey - they could be Martians trying to destroy the world and nobody would know the difference." I followed that idea and it became my first novel– *Seven From The Stars*. Go thou and do likewise.

Early in my career I had an agent, or rather a representative, who kept pressuring me to write (for large sums of money) for the *Ladies Home Journal* and similar magazines. In his opinion I should have written this stuff for just 3 months out of the year, as I would make enough money to write whatever I liked for the rest of the time. "What shall it profit a man if he gaineth the world and lose his own soul?" If I had spent my time thinking about the kind of thing that's thought about in the *Ladies Home Journal* - there wouldn't have been enough left of the real me to put in a slot machine. Where the heart is - there the person is. So maybe some people have enough energy to do that - I haven't met any and certainly I'm not one of them.

If God gave me my talent and I believe that he did - he gave it to me to say certain things with - and I'm saying them. So tell the truth and shame the devil. ❧

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Ms Marion Zimmer Bradley
Fantasy Magazine
P.O. Box 11095
Oakland, CA 94611-9991

American Red Cross Bay Area
1550 Sutter Street
San Francisco, CA 94109
415/776-4633
FAX 415-776-8445 July 23, 1990

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(this paragraph was excerpted from a two page thank you letter, space did not permit replication of the entire letter - jlb)

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SUGAR TWIN

Randall Allen Farmer

"But Mom..." I mean, why did she come to visit me if it wasn't to hear me complain? I sighed and cuddled Sugarlumps, who was sitting in my lap and purring. Finally. The cat had spent the entire morning tearing around the house.

Mom shook her head at me. "So you had a miscarriage. You're not the first person in the world to miscarry. You're not the first person in the world to have a miscarriage and find out that you're still pregnant."

"Twins, mom, and I lost one." Mom was being her normally useful self. All the way down to Biloxi in that rattletrap Pontiac of hers, to comfort me, and all she does is tell me to quit moping. Comfort. Hah! Like the time I broke my leg in a car accident, and her comforting consisted of getting me to hop around the block twice each day, to 'get my exercise.'

"You've told me so several times already, Andy. You know, in the Old Country, something like this wouldn't have fazed any of the farm wives. They would have just kept on going ..."

Mom never lets anyone forget that she spent the first five years of her life in Eastern Europe. Nor would she let anyone forget the farmwives, and how they were sturdy and hard working, not thin and bony like I was. The wisdom she had picked up in her first five years was simply amazing ... in volume.

"You know, Mom, it wouldn't be that awful if you changed the subject."

Mom looked me over several times, slowly. "You know, Andy, I really don't like the mood you're in."

I heard a bird chirping outside, and Sugarlumps leapt up, and bolted out the cat door.

"And don't 'But Mom' me."

Humph.

"So I'll tell you a story."

Awww geee, here comes the saccharine.

"Don't purse your lips, Andy. It doesn't become you." Mom took another sip of her black coffee and recrossed her bony legs. "I heard this story in the Old Country, from my mother and my Aunt Polly. It was the sort of story they told when there weren't any men around."

Mom glanced over at Harold, who was snoring on the couch, in a post-football game snooze. "That being the case ..."

I giggled. At least Mom knew how to tell a story.

Mom bent over, toward me. "In the Old Country, like here, it wasn't unknown for women to have miscarriages, then end up still pregnant with a second. I suppose not everyone took it well, despite the fact that they were back in the fields the next day, working their hands raw to survive. It's human nature, I guess, to dwell on might-have-beens and what-ifs, and especially to worry that since you miscarried one, you would miscarry the other. So when something like this happened, early in a woman's pregnancy, the old ladies called one a 'sugar twin', telling the still expectant mother that it was too sweet to live. Isn't that sort of a strange name?"

I nodded.

"What the old ladies said was that if the sugar twin had been born, it never would have cried, never wet itself, never fussed. A little angel. Because angels belonged in heaven, God had called it back, before it could do irreparable harm.

"But they also said that the sugar twin would not be called back immediately. It was too sweet, too much of an angel, for that. What sugar twins did was appoint themselves guardians of their twin sibs, and make sure that the sib lived to be born. It was always said that mothers who had a sugar twin could look forward to a large, healthy baby, because it was being guarded well and constantly looked after. The expectant mother would then begin to feel that the worst was over, that she wouldn't have any more troubles with her pregnancy."

I looked over at Mom, and smiled. That was such a nice story. Mom smiled back, and pulled me forward, conspiratorially.

"There's more, you know."

There always was, with Mom's stories. I sniffed a little, wiped my eyes, and nodded.

"The old farm wives also said that if you had a sugar twin, and if you were very careful, you could see it running around your house, a little inch high angelic toddler, doing its errands and good deeds."

"Aww."

Mom smiled. "The story I remember is the story of Terinka, who was a klutz. She was the sort of person who couldn't make a fire without it escaping the fireplace, the sort of person who could boil water and burn it. Anyway, in the story, Terinka had a sugar twin, but she didn't know that she still carried another. So she went to start the evening fire, and as usual, she had made it from bad pine, and it spat sparks across the floor. Much to her amazement, this little inch-high toddler leapt across the floor and swept the sparks up. Terinka was amazed."

Mom paused to drink her coffee, and I looked down at Sugarlumps, who had come in and was rubbing up against my leg, loudly purring.

What a wonderful little story. Too bad if it was just a story, though. I could have used a little helper, right about now. Morning sickness. I wondered why it was called morning sickness—it seemed to last all day. Never could get anything done. What was worse, the pregnant lady books said that I wasn't even up to my clumsy period, yet.

With a start, Sugarlumps bolted from under my legs, tearing across the floor in chase mode. I blinked reverie away, and shook my head. I didn't see what Sugarlumps was after.

"I didn't know you had a mouse problem, Andy." Mom tsk-tsk-ed at me.

"We don't, Mom. We don't."❧

Randall Allen Farmer

I'm an over thirty male who recently got extremely tired of what he was doing (being a geophysicist/computer programmer at a major oil company) and decided to chuck it all and write. I'm currently spending much of my time being the primary caregiver to my newborn son, Alex, who is Marjorie and my first. I have an MS in Geophysics; my hobbies include fiction reading, history reading, other reading, fantasy role playing games (a bad case of referee disease, that), carpentry, computers and cooking. This is my second sale.

Vegetable Matter

Lynne Armstrong-Jones

"All right, there, my little darling! Drink up, yes. There you go, my sweet. Oh, and you too, my beloved. Look how you've grown!"

Zella was smiling broadly — as she always did while she cared for her plantlife.

The greatest friends one could ever have! They never argued or complained — simply took with gratitude all the food, water and love that she gave them.

With gratitude, yes. Zella had no doubt that they shared her feelings of love.

She placed another pot in a sunnier place on the old table, carefully moving still another to make more room. She moved slowly and carefully, her thin fingers now painful once more with the arthritis. The sun felt warm and pleasant. Zella raised her face, wrinkled with the years, and stood silently, feeling almost as though she was a plant herself...how glorious!

The fact that the children in town — yes, and even some of the adults, too — thought her a witch bothered her not at all. She rarely needed to go to town, anyway. And, when she did, she really did not mind the stares of the adults and the taunts of some of the children. They thought her foolish to lavish so much care and attention on her plants, she knew,but little did they understand...

She was quite content with her life and her plants. They provided most of the food she ate...and certainly *all* of the companionship she needed. So lovingly did her tomato plants seem to give her their crimson gifts — and the grapevines and berry bushes out in her garden...

It would not be long now, though. Already the sun was beginning its downward journey. Night tended to fall quickly in this part of the woods.

Well, thought Zella; at least I do not need to cover all of my loved ones just yet. The nights are still warm enough for them.

The crickets were chirping happily outside her window as she prepared to retire to her bed. She looked out at the night, then closed her eyes and drank in all of the wonderful sounds.

Of life. *Her* life.

She drifted into a contented sleep, dreaming of her green and brown friends who surrounded her even in this room.

The loud crash had her sitting up quickly, her heart beating so frantically she feared it would burst —

She shook her head in confusion. What could be happening?

Voices. From somewhere outside, near her house. She couldn't make out what they were saying.But she could tell that they were not in her precious garden: for that she was grateful. At least, she thought, no one is attempting to steal the fruit of my loved ones!

But then she heard the voices once more. They were at her front door —

"Come on, Billy! The door's open!"

"I dunno, Jack. We shouldn't be doin' this!"

"Aw, come on. We're not gonna hurt anything — we're just gonna see it for ourselves. That's all. Come on — what're ya' waitin' for? Scared? Is that your problem?"

"No. I'm n-not sc-scared!"

Zella rose from her bed and moved to the doorway to listen.

"Wow! Look at all this stuff! She really *is* crazy!"

Jack's companion didn't seem to be sharing the enthusiasm. "M-maybe she *is* a witch!"

"Oh, come on! Hey, over here — look at this! The old hag has some money stashed in here, too. Silver pieces, lots of them! All right!"

There was a tinkling sound, now. The boy was obviously helping himself to what he doubtlessly regarded as a new-found treasure.

How foolish, thought Zella; how foolish they are to attempt their heinous act while I am here in my home.

She stepped into the adjoining room. A beam of moonglow almost seemed to follow her, stopping where she did and surrounding her with light.

Jack looked up. Before him he saw an old, frail woman whose age was rumoured to have affected her mind. But his companion must have seen something different—he had disappeared, quickly, out the door.

Jack laughed. "You really *are* crazy, old woman! Look at you. Do you think you can keep me from taking your money? Ha!"

Zella's face was devoid of expression — save perhaps for a brief flash of pity. She stepped forward —

But Jack misread her intentions.

And he made a mistake. He gave in to the fear he'd been trying to deny —he struck her, and watched as she fell to the floor, and he raised his hand for another blow.

But suddenly he was jerked back, his foot caught on something.

He gasped, his eyes widening in horror, the long, green tendril as it wrapped itself firmly around his leg, pulling him, slowly but surely, toward a huge, greenish thing in the corner of the room —

He looked up toward the old woman — but her eyes were not focussed on him.

"It's all right, Flora, dear," Zella said softly. "Don't let yourself get too distressed - you'll wilt! And, anyway, the child will not be bothering us ever again.

"*Will* you?" ❧

The King's Gold

Carl Thelan

The King, Queen, courtiers and guards all stared, fascinated. An old woman knelt at the foot of the dais holding up a smooth white stone about the size of a man's head that glowed softly from within. The King stood up, eyes wide and mouth agape. "A pearl!"

The Queen had been lounging with one leg thrown over the armrest of her throne, her golden dress revealing her shapely leg to the admiring gazes of the courtiers. Putting down her jeweled handmirror, she stood up and took a few flowing steps down the dais toward the kneeling merchants. "It is indeed beautiful, Kalisa," she said in wonderment, reaching out to touch it.

"Carissa, Your Majesty," the old woman corrected her. "It is by far the largest of its kind in the world.,"

"The largest of its kind!" the Queen cooed. "It would look lovely as the centerpiece of a new crown!"

The King took a few steps down and put his arm around her waist. "I think the weight would overburden your fragile neck, dearest."

"I'll have it if I want it!" she snapped.

"Of course, my love! I was only thinking of you!" he gushed desperately, batting his eyelashes at her.

"Of me! You're so sweet," she cooed, batting her eyelashes back at him. She turned back to Carissa, all business. "How much?"

"Two thousand Royals, Your Majesty."

"Two thousand!" the Queen shouted. "That's outrageous! You couldn't even carry that much gold!"

"I could," Carissa replied with a voice that left no doubt.

The Queen's eyes narrowed to little slits. "Perhaps my guards could take it from you."

Carissa rose slowly, imperiously, all obsequiousness gone; she stood straighter and taller than either the Queen or the King. Her eyes locked onto the Queen's with a grip of steel. "That could be...interesting."

The King opened his mouth to speak, but closed it and dropped his gaze. The courtiers took an involuntary step "We can work something out," the Queen said silkily. "Surely even so magnificent a pearl cannot be worth two thousand Royals."

"The people of the Westlands are starving because the bridge has not been repaired since it collapsed two years ago," Carissa told her. "The orphanage has given the children leave to beg in the streets, neglecting their studies for want of money to feed them. The sailors of the Patrol are on the verge of mutiny because their pay is so far in arrears that their families are going hungry. There is much I must do with the money from this one pearl."

The King looked down at his silk shoes. "Uh, yes, well..."

"Very well," the Queen said quietly. "Two thousand."

The Royal goldsmith was an honest, hard-working man who had much to do these days. His large workroom in the High Tower was a clutter of benches, tables and tools as organized as any artist; that is to say, not at all. It was lit by several large windows by day and a dozen candelabras by night. Several mirrors around the room allowed the Queen to admire herself with her new jewelry the moment it was completed. Her excitement knew no bounds when she brought the pearl to him that night. He set it on a workbench and started hammering gold into sheets while she cheerfully began sketching every filigree and curve of her magnificent new crown.

Immersed in their tasks, neither of them noticed when the pearl began to grow and change color from white to yellow to green. It was recognizable as a small dragon rather than a pearl by the time it grew large enough to knock a small crucible off the bench. Startled by the crash, the Queen and the goldsmith looked up. Astounded by the growing dragon, they stared in awe and fright. The dragon regarded them with amusement, and looked all around the room. She stopped growing when about twice the length of a horse, unlimbered her wings and started towards a window.

The Queen had regained her composure enough to croak, "Wha—Wha—"

The goldsmith was slightly more loquacious: "G - G - G - Guards!"

Two mailed soldiers burst into the room, swords and shields ready. "How did that get in here?" one asked nervously.

The dragon was already wedging her shoulders through the window frame, cracking away little bits of stone. "Don't let it get away!" the Queen shouted. One man dropped his sword and shield and grabbed the dragon's tail. He managed to hold on while he was whirled around once, then twice, but finally was sent skidding across a table to land ignominously on the coal bin making a tremendous puff of black dust. With a saucy wag of her tail, the dragon flew off.

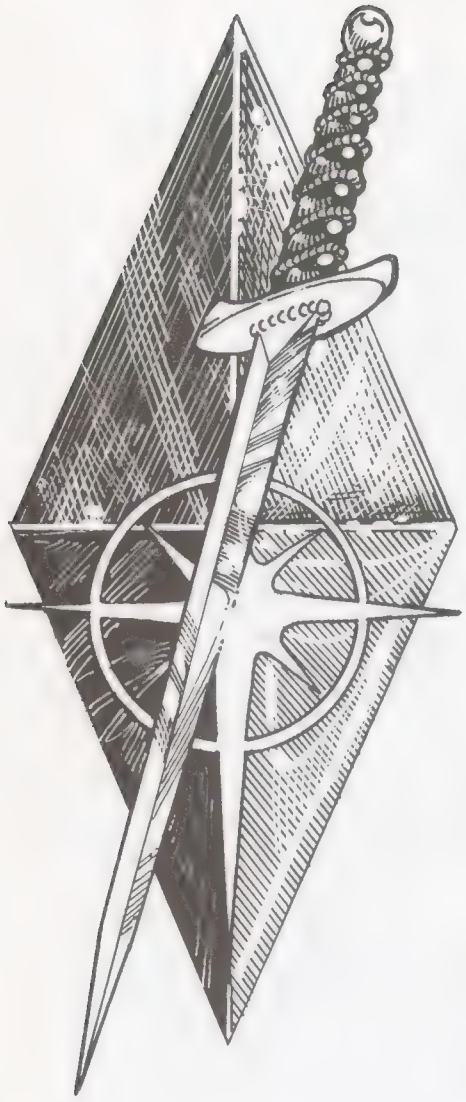
Outside the tower, the dragon circled the city once to get her bearings, then soared over the east road until she reached a border station. Descending slowly, she landed next to an old woman waiting there with her horse. Carissa hugged the dragon's neck. "Pearl, you're absolutely priceless!" ❧

Carl Thelen :

I was born the son of an itinerant computer engineer, back in the days when computer engineers were itinerant. It must run in the family: the only one of us who isn't a professional programmer designs scientific packages for satellites. Actually, programming part-time is a reasonable way to pay the bills while I make my fame and fortune in writing. I majored in history at UC Berkeley and wore my S.C.A. armor to the graduation ceremony instead of the traditional gown. Later I learned what a stink I'd made—they wanted to take away my diploma or something. If they can't take a joke ...

My continuing interest in history, particularly the history of technology and ships, helps me keep things realistic. I hope to make my niche writing nautical fantasy. I am a member of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Workshop, which will soon print my series of articles on the development of ships and seafaring. (Ever try to compress 5000 years of history into 10,000 words? Ha!)

My only other professional sale was a story called "Pearl" to MZB's **Sword and Sorceress** VI. Check it out.



Pas de Deux

Nancy L. Pine

"I am still not certain why you are so insistent on hiring me, Your Highness. My rates are high, and you could find a less expensive bodyguard elsewhere."

He shrugged. "The money I would save I can't spend if I am dead. And an assassin is less likely to consider a woman a threat to his plans."

True enough.

So for several weeks she watched. Everyone who came near the prince, every object around him, was studied for the threat it might bear. She became a dark shadow at his back, ever there, but passing almost unseen. Fortunately, she did not have to taste his food for him—at her suggestion, he assigned someone else that chore.

And then, one night at dinner, a servant passed between them carrying a tray. He cut off her view for a moment, and she was on her feet, reacting even before she knew what she was reacting to. By the time the knife had appeared from under the tray and was aimed for the prince's heart, her hand was already reaching for the man's wrist, pulling him away, so that the knife passed within inches of the prince, but did not so much as touch his clothing.

She continued pulling the man away as the tray clattered to the floor. They ended up facing each other, knives in their hands. Her blood sang, and she danced toward him, prepared for a fight. Whoever he was, he was professional, and she had often ached for a decent combat.

They met, matched, parried, danced away again. No blood. On the second time they met, and as he continued the first dance, seeking the match and parry. She came underneath, and opened his arm to the bone. She was fond of dancing, true, but in the appropriate time and place.

As he was carried away for the surgeons to heal before the Questioning (a peculiar sequence of events, when one considers the matter), his eyes flicked open and he stared at her.

"How did you know that trick with the tray?" His fingers were touching the tiny assassin's guild pin he wore, far too openly for her taste.

"It seems obvious."

He shook his head wearily, not denying her words, but confused. "I thought only an assassin would know it."

She flipped her collar down so that he might see the symbol she wore. His eyes showed confusion.

"But, why?"

The prince was standing beside her, watching the scene, his eyes showing the same amusement they had when he first asked her, a master assassin, to be his bodyguard. She gave the man the same answer the prince had given her.

"A fox knows best how other foxes enter the hencoop."❧

After the Dragon is Dead

Lawrence Watt-Evans

I stepped out onto the western terrace and stopped to marvel at the blaze of glory that the setting sun had spread across the sky for our enjoyment. Golden light streamed around the clouds, edging them with fire, while the sun was a crimson oval on a background of pinks and blues more delicate than the finest court painter could ever concoct.

In the village below the townspeople were lighting torches for their celebration, and by those distant flickers I could make out a thin black line in the square with a thickening at the top, the pole on which the usurper-tyrant's head was impaled.

A serving girl, one of those we had so recently freed fom the tyrant's harem, knelt beside me and offered a goblet of pomegranate juice, iced with snow brought down from the mountain tops. As I accepted it, she looked up at me, and from the expression in her lovely brown eyes, I knew that she was offering more than this mere sweet.

I brushed the hair that spilled down over her shoulders, and smiled at her. "Will you bring something to my chamber when I retire tonight? I asked.

She nodded, speechlessly.

I left her kneeling there and crossed to the rail, where my young comrad, Algarven stood admiring the view, the Princess Loriana at his side.

"Never have I seen so prosperous and beautiful a land," he said, as his arm found its way around his beloved's waist.

"And free of the usurper and his monster now, she replied, "Thanks to you two."

Algarven smiled an acknowledgement, and hugged her to him.

"The people adore you, you know," she said.

"They do now," I said, "But it never lasts. If we stay, one day we'll hear them grumbling about us, just as they did about old Kendrik the Oppressor, there."

Algarven stared at me in surprise. "You're joking," he said, "We're their saviors! We'll always be loved."

I shrugged and did not press the point.

Algarven said, "I'll be glad to grow old here, with my love at my side."

I shrugged again.

I knew that I, at least, would be packed and gone before the year was out. I've done this before. This was Algarven's first stint as a hero, though, and he still believed in happy endings.

Maybe he was right; maybe he would stay there without getting bored or wearing out his welcome. Some people manage it. I smiled, and resolved to do my best to enjoy the glory while I could.

"A beautiful evening," I said, with a wave at the western sky.

"A beautiful evening," Algarven agreed. "A beautiful evening, a beautiful bride, a palace, my people, the dragon dead and its master beheaded -- ah," he signed, lifing his tankard of ale in salute, "It doesn't get any better than this!"❧

Painted Lady

Susan Johnson

The merchant ship *Delight*, newly returned from the North Cape, rested at home in New Bedford harbor. Salt-stained and bleached by the months at sea, she swayed at her moorings like a weary bird breathing slowly at rest, white wings folded. The ship was quiet, only the creaking timbers and slapping ropes disturbing her sleep. Her crew had spilled exultantly into their home port, and, with the arrival of the autumn dusk, her cargo was no longer being worked.

Captain Nickerson had gone ashore with her papers, standing for the first time in nearly a year before men of greater authority than his own. Now he walked through the deep blue night, his greatcoat drawn close around his body and the collar turned up around his jaw. He felt strangely ambivalent about being in port. It was good to be free of responsibility for a week or two, but he had no place to go.

A light burned in a window. The captain hesitated, drawn by the glow. But he was sick of the company of men, and he had no friends ashore to join him in drinking. He didn't care to return so soon to his berth aboard the *Delight*, but he knew only the familiar path to the piers.

Dry leaves skittered with the groaning rush of the wind as Captain Nickerson trudged aimlessly back toward the sigh of the waves. The docks were deserted, until suddenly a shadow moved and the captain froze, alert. He was unafraid of robbers waiting in the dark; sober, he was sure he could handle any man. But there was no menace in the phantom form, slim and small. This was what he needed tonight, he realized; a woman! But still he was cautious. He knew no good woman would walk unescorted at night, and an honest woman wouldn't be watching him with as much interest as this one displayed. But she carried herself well, with something about her attitude and posture that was different from the air of a whore. Captain Nickerson slowed.

The woman cocked her head a little, and, to his complete amazement, her face lit with welcome. "Joshua?" she asked, as her blue eyes glowed with recognition.

Captain Nickerson stared at her incredulously. It was his name all right, and there was something very familiar about this woman. He saw now that she was no prostitute; though not wealthy, she dressed with care, and there was a gentleness about her that a professionally harsh streetwalker never had. Her face was lovely, though he saw that she really wasn't young, and her blonde hair glinted in the glow of the last light on the dock. He knew her, yet he didn't.

"Aye," he replied uneasily, and the woman's face brightened. She approached confidently, while he tried to remember her name. One of his sisters? Not likely. Both were prosperously married, one to a Virginia planter and the other to a Boston merchant. Neither would be strolling the New Bedford docks on a cold night! A former school teacher? But this woman wasn't nearly old enough for that!

She gazed into his face, and her welcoming smile faded. "You don't know me?" she asked, and he was ashamed of himself.

"I do, but I have forgotten your name," he admitted, and quickly apologized. "I have just returned from a long voyage, and that may be why I have trouble placing you. What brings you to the docks?" he inquired, grasping for a clue.

"I come here to relax."

It was an odd answer from a woman, but Captain Nickerson thought he could understand it. The sea and ships brought him professional worries, but there was a special peace in the soft rush of the waves.

The woman walked beside him and paused when he did, both looking at the now silhouetted *Delight*.

After a moment, the woman remarked quietly, "You still don't remember me." Captain Nickerson looked at her in bewilderment.

"I do know you," he replied once again. "I just can't think how!"

The woman smiled. "You loved me," she told him. "I was very special to you."

She touched his hand, and he felt a shivery tingle he hadn't experienced...since Katherine. *My God*, he thought with a start, *is it possible*? But the hope collapsed into sharp sorrow, for Katherine had brown hair, and would not yet be thirty years old. "I loved you?" Captain Nickerson repeated, confused now, uncertain. Yes, he knew her...but who? He had never loved the women he hired, and they spoke nothing of love either. There was only Katherine, his girl-bride, a teenager when she'd been given to him by a father who knew what a shipmaster could earn. Strangely, Captain Nickerson had fallen in love with her, an alien idea to him, both then and now. He'd carried her in his heart wherever the ship took him, and when Katherine had met him at the dock, with newborn Jeremy in her arms, he'd known a happiness he'd never dreamed possible. As his wife had taught him to love, his son had taught him to play, and for the only time in his life, Captain saw th last light on the dock. He knew her, yet he Nickerson had been contented.

But he'd overlooked the disadvantages of having a very young wife. Katherine had hated, to see him leave. "Widowhood in marriage", she'd called it. He'd tried to explain, but how could he describe the pull of the sea that called him as the moon called the tides? How could he tell her of the feel of the bounding Delight? He'd felt the unspoken desperation in the way Katherine had clung to him at night, but he couldn't resist the sea that lapped so enticingly just beyond his bedroom window.

His pride wouldn't let him accept the possibility that Katherine had found a more attentive man. All he knew was that he'd come home one day to discover that both his wife and son were gone. Confused, stabbed through the heart, Captain Nickerson had cast back and forth around the house and the town for a night and a day. Neighbor women watched him, pitying, but knowing Katherine's side of the tale as well; at last one of them had told him that Katherine indeed had left him., forever.

He couldn't believe it; but she didn't return.

Over the years, his pain and grief had subsided to anger, and finally to bitterness. And yet he remained faithful to her, in a strange way. When loneliness and desire sent him to a brothel, the girls and the surroundings always faded: Captain Nickerson was again in his handsome mansion with his beloved wife. But there was no fulfillment, only bleakness.

Tonight, he wouldn't take any woman after all. His emotions were spent just on memories. He wished that he'd gone to the tavern, but there was a bottle of rum, still untapped, in his cabin. He could drink himself to sleep, unreached by dreams, and wake to a morning less tormenting than the night. But he was still curious about the woman, and when he turned toward her, he saw that she was about to slip away.

"Wait!" he called. "When did I love you?" The woman stopped and looked at him sadly.

"Always," she replied, and vanished into the night. Captain Nickerson shrugged, and returned to the *Delight*, the rum, and the freedom of stupor.

In the morning, sick and savage, he staggered out of his berth and back to the pier. As he passed his moored vessel, something caught his eye. Pausing, he stared at the figurehead, a carved woman, blonde, with painted, ocean-blue eyes. And Captain Nickerson knew, then, what woman it was against whom even Katherine had been powerless, and to whom he was enslaved, forever. ❧

This Old Castle

Dyanna Cara

My name is Naiareshta. Before the war, I was a student, willing to learn of those who were willing to teach. When the war started, I gave my services as a wizard to my lord's army. Many units of time have passed between then and now, and I have experienced many things....

The great fortress of black stone appeared not to have been occupied for at least one hundred cycles. The once steep cliffs around the moat had crumbled to leave only a slight valley. Spiney vines had infiltrated the cracks between stones where the mortar had turned to dust. The sole inhabitant, dressed in once fine robes now turned grey with time, stood in the archway of the slightly opened doors and waited for the riders to approach. Hope flooded over her as she remembered....

She and her brother had come to this place for refuge from a storm. It looks the same now as it did then, and for a thousand cycles before. The old man, the only one in the hall, invited them to stay out the storm in the dryness of his home. He set before them a magnificent feast, and their goblets never lacked for wine.

After the meal, he showed the pair to their chambers. Allowing them to pass before him through the doorway to their rooms, the ancient magician picked up a poker and cruelly delivered a blow to the brother's head. She tried to scream; she tried to help her brother, but she could do nothing. The magic was too strong. She but watched as his life melted away. The old wizard straightened. His muscles gained a fine tone, and his face lost its many wrinkles. The murderer was feeding on the life of her brother! Hatred and despair washed over her as breakers on a beach.

The sorcerer had violently embraced her and forced his mouth against hers, his teeth cutting her lips; his arms leaving bruises on her back. She had felt the magic become part of her, and could clearly recall the words he spoke after pulling away. "You shall not leave these stone walls until you find someone to trade!" He evaporated with an exaultant, "Finally, I am free!" His laughter faded from the room, but it never left her mind.

The magic well preserved her youthful features though many long cycles had passed. Still she could not forgive the old wizard, but now she fully understood....

The two weary men pulled their horses up just beyond the trees. Both men and their animals wore light armor, with the insignia indicating the red-haired man as a captain. He was the first to speak. "May we stable our horses here tonight, and dine under the protection of your roof?"

Motioning them to come into the courtyard, she swung the heavy doors fully open. "In the stable to the left, Sir, you will find all you need to care for your animals. I'll go and prepare refreshments," she said as she withdrew.

The fire crackled comfortably, and the wine soothed what aches the food had missed. The three sat in large, overstuffed chairs around the fire. A small table in the middle of them, within easy reach of all, held an assortment of wines and brandy. She asked for news, and many tales were told as the night wore on. The woman and the fiery-haired leader sat across from one another, she never quite meeting his gaze. When exhaustion settled over them, she showed the leader's companion to his room. That done, she and the captain walked arm in arm to another. Closing the door behind them, she, at last, fully met his eyes and smiled deep satisfaction.

I am Naiareshta. I know. I was her trade. ❧

"Dyanna Cara"
Chrystal Cuzick:
I have lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma for the last several years and am currently enrolled in a local university. I will be in Central America doing missions work for the summer. I have had a piece of work published in ORIGINALS, which is a small publication of East Central University. I have been writing for six years, and the many aspects of nature are usually subject to my graceless cacoethes.

Half Mercy

Brad Strickland

Long ago, a young magician named Vindeno fled his master, to seek his fortune in the odd city of Gundol: a city where men fear house cats. Like many another, Vindeno encountered a world far harder than he had imagined; and at last, he unwillingly solicited employment from a notorious bandit leader, Dakken.

"Can you work a silence spell, boy?" asked Dakken.

Vindeno nodded. "It will take a day to formulate, but I can cast one."

Dakken grinned through his tangle of dark beard, "Will it stick?"

"I can silence anyone I see."

"Even if the target is a sorcerer?"

Vindeno swallowed. "Even so."

That night, they journeyed southwestward into Akrador, a barren level plain of arid gravel where not even a blade of saltgrass grew. No night bird's cry, no insect's chirr, disturbed the silence. Indeed, the only sounds Vindeno heard were those made by himself, by Dakken, by the four rogues who made up Dakken's band, and by the six sorry desert ponies they rode.

Dakken spoke of their quarry: "I have word that a sorcerer is crossing the desert, alone save for a dwarf guide and a single servant. The sorcerer performed a service for the town of Markelibor and bears a rich reward in gold. He must make for the pass at Javel to cross the Agrav Mountains; we will waylay him in the desert two days' journey from the pass."

The bandits camped during the heat of the day, and Vindeno formulated his spell of silence. They traveled for five nights, and then camped beside the trail from Markelibor to Javel.

As they waited, Vindeno felt his resolve wavering. He was only a boy of eighteen, and he had never lifted hand or spell against another; but he was poor, and Dakken promised gold, and so he readied the spell.

Finally, just at dawn, the lookout shouted that he saw them: a dwarf riding a pony like their own, an old man in long purple robes, and a young girl following. The last two were mounted on shaggy sapads, and led two more, both heavily laden with goods—and no doubt with gold, the lookout added with a grin.

The five robbers and Vindeno stood unarmed around their fire, smiling as if they, too, were merely travelers at a chance meeting. "Look at the girl," growled Dakken as their prey drew closer. "She can't be as old as you, Vindeno. What a lecherous old ram our sorcerer is! Spell him silent."

Vindeno chanted. A hundred paces away the old man reined in his mount, aware of magic working, but before he could counter, the spell was spoken and Vindeno felt the rush of power that told him it had worked.

The bandits sprang forward. The battle was brief; they wrestled the old man to the ground in silence and knocked the dwarf senseless from his pony. Dakken himself caught the reins of the woman's hooting sapad. "We've come to your rescue, maiden," he said with an evil smile. "You will like lusty young fellows better than an old skeleton of a wizard." To his men, Dakken said, "Kill the others."

"No!" Vindeno shouted. Weakened by his magic, he had lagged behind; he limped forward, panting. "They are harmless now."

Dakken raised an eyebrow. "So? We will leave them tied hand and foot here, then, with no water or beasts. If they have wit enough to live, then live they shall."

The girl on the sapad was heartbreakingly beautiful. Her black hair flowed down her neck; her violet eyes stared into Vindeno as if beseeching aid. Looking away, the boy swallowed and said, "Very well."

"Now cast one more spell for me," the bandit chief said.

Vindeno shook his head. "I must rest for a day at least, for I am not a sorcerer myself, you know, only a talented apprentice."

"Too bad. Let me help you down, my dear." Dakken roughly jerked the girl off her steed. She did not fall, but again her eyes pleaded with Vindeno. Dakken reached for the clasp of her robe. "Let's see what treasures lie beneath these rags."

"No, " Vindeno said once again.

Dakken did not look around. "Tie the boy; he shall keep the dwarf and the wizard company."

The girl spoke then, five strange words in a sweet voice, and all the world turned to fire. Vindeno cried out and groped, struck blind. He heard the shouts of Dakken and his men and understood they all shared his plight. The boy felt tears flowing down his cheeks. "I spelled the wrong one silent," he said. "I mistook the servant for the master."

The girl's sweet voice answered from the enveloping darkness: "A woman may have magic as well as a man; she may even be a sorceress with more than one spell to speak at a time. You showed us only half mercy, and just so much shall I show you. You alone, apprentice magician, will have no memory."

She spoke again, and with her words, Vindeno's soul took flight and he knew no more of this world.

To this day, six man-tall standing stones remain in the desert two days' journey west of Javel. One, a little apart from the others, seems an ordinary stone, but the other five, arranged on the perimeter of a rough circle, are different, for they weep. Water trickles down the face of each to form a little puddle, no more than five paces broad, in the hollow between them. Desperate eastbound travelers have saved their lives by drinking from this pool.

However, the water offers a traveler dying of thirst only half mercy. It will keep one alive—barely—but the taste is brackish and unpleasant, as bitter on the tongue as tears of undying regret. ❧

Brad Strickland is the author of five published novels and forty-five works of short fiction. In addition to *MZBFM*, his work has appeared in *Asimov's, Amazing Stories, The Magazine of Fantasy* and *Science Fiction, Harper's*, and other periodicals and anthologies, including *The Year's Best Horror XV and XVII*. His most recent novel is the science fiction thriller, *Children of the Knife* (NAL/Onyx). He is a teacher at Gainesville College and lives in Oakwood, GA, with his family.

The End of Art

Daniel H. Jeffers

The city of Mardigus, renowned as the center for leaning and magic, also hosted an assortment of old crazy people who seemed to live on the street, and spend their days playing with dirt, mud, and other noble substances with total fascination.

Tachus roughly shoved one of the old men aside—the politeness and respect for his elders he had come with had long since faded—and knocked on the door of the huge, ornate tower which dominated this sector of Mardigus.

"What do you wish of the great one?" the door asked.

"I am expected. The great one has agreed to instruct me," Tachus said to the door. He wondered about the spell which animated it. Did the door understand that it was speaking? Would it remember that he was standing there if he knocked again, or would it ask the same question?

The door opened, and Tachus entered, following an illusionary servant into a waiting room which was also dressed in illusion. Wooden chairs looked like golden thrones, the small mean desk appeared as a huge expanse of marble. Dried shoots looked like enormous flowers in wild colors.

When Dolorak entered the room, he was dressed in the most common cloth, decked out with illusion. Tachus had seen other mages do this type of thing.

Those mages, including Matriad, his most recent master, had all disappeared at some point without explanation.

The degree of poverty was more than he remembered though; Dolorak's garment was almost as tattered as the clothing of the crazy people who clustered in the street.

"You are Tachus? I have heard much about you."

"Really? Who among the great would waste their breath on me?" Tachus asked.

"Your name was in the air. You have learned much of the first two stages."

The first stage of magic was that of the mind. Practitioners could mislead the mind by confusing the senses, and even change the way a particular mind worked.

The second stage was the elemental manipulation of forces. In the cosmology of Mardigus, forces were always moving, the magician merely redirected.

Tachus had mastered these arts, and could have made his way well throughout most of the world. Only in Mardigus was he not at the top of the magical fraternity. What he wanted was to understand the inner forms of objects. All objects were considered an expression of some more perfect form, and the mage who could see that guiding form would have great power.

"Though you have achieved much, you still allow the world to tell you which forms are good, and which are beneath contempt," Dolorak was saying. Tachus listened patiently but he had heard this speech many times.

"'I am old enough to crave the inner nature of things. Yet no one wishes to instruct me. I can pay very well."

"With gold? Gems? Perhaps with dung?"

"I did not mean to offend, great one."

"You did not offend, Tachus, you merely missed my point. Dung and gold are both objects, both the representation of great forms. The reason you have had so much trouble is that you insist on using the ideas of the common people to distinguish them."

"I see no point in magic which converts gold to dung."

"Then the magic may not be for you. There is a point in the life of every mage when he has to decide whether he wants to hang on to the world or take his learning to the very limit."

"If you would just show me the way of seeing forms, I could then decide what to take and what to live for."

"It's not that easy. Once you have seen true forms, there is no way to un-see them. All of the things you desire may prove meaningless, while those you denounce could have that inner beauty you seek."

"I wish only to understand and master the greatest of the magics. I have the ability and the character."

"So you say."

Tachus imaged himself for a moment, seeing himself as he appeared to the old man. He was young, but mature, not hotheaded. He was quick, ambitious within the bounds of his morals. What flaw prevented the mages of Mardigus from taking him in?

"I will give you enough vision to see beneath just one set of appearances,": Dolorak continued, "If you come back after that...You will not be so eager next time we meet."

"I will return, master."

With that, Dolorak reached over and rubbed a substance on Tachus' eyes. The substance burned slightly, and by the time Tachus had recovered his vision, Dolorak was gone and the illusionary servant stood by to lead him out the door.

On the doorstep, the crazy people blocked his way again. They were all playing with some stones, encrusted with dirt and who knows what else, dug from the garden plot by the door. Their unconcern for the dignity of the man whose garden they defiled infuriated Tachus, and he grabbed one of them and whirled him around.

And looked into the eyes of his old master. Matriad, the man who had taught him so much, now dressed as a street person, running around playing in dirt.

Matriad looked at Tachus with a question in his eyes. "Are you one of us?" the eyes seemed to say. The other crazy people were looking at him now; many of them he recognized, he had studied under them. All had the same question on their faces.

A woman—he remembered her though she no longer used spells to maintain her youth and beauty—stretched out her hand to Tachus. Holding it as if it were some great gift, she started to hand him an object. When he recognized what it was, he slapped her hand and ran from the group.

He ran back to his room and started packing. He knew he would not ever go back to Dolorak. He had character, but not the kind that valued dung over gold. ❧

Daniel H. Jeffers : I grew up in California, out in the Mojave desert, outside of a town called Ridgecrest. I spent six years in the Navy, four of them on board a submarine, which certainly contributed to my interest in fantasy. Presently I am finishing up my undergraduate degree in Philosophy at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

This will be the first non-humorous fiction piece I have published, but I have been writing in several areas for a number of years. Currently I work on the staff of the Daily Nexus, the student daily newspaper, where I write science and news, as well as write and edit the bi-weekly humor supplement. I also write occasional articles for the Ventura edition of the *Los Angeles Times*.

The inspiration for this particular story comes from one of Plato's dialogues, in which Socrates is defending his theory of forms. Parmenides asks if things like mud and dirt have forms, and Socrates replies that it would be absurd for base things to have perfect forms. Parmenides chides Socrates for being young and worrying too much about the opinion of the world.

High Fantasy

David Vincent Brinkley

Olin the Bold, Lord of the Northwood, had finally reached the last outcropping of branches of the giant Stonepine. Above him, piercing dizzy heights over the boulder-laden and wind-hewn rifts of the mountain, the pinnacle of the monarch of trees awaited his axe. There at the tip, the wounded Demoneagle sought refuge, pulling at the arrow in its breast with frothing beak.

"Your terror in these woods has ended, bird!" Olin said to the sky, and the wind carried his words away. "I will top this tree from under you, and your last flight of fear will be your own, down to the rocks."

The huge Demoneagle stopped working at the arrow and looked below at Olin, madness in its eyes. Rays from the high sun flashed on his steely talons and its crimson breast rose and fell with labored breathing.

Olin checked his footing on the last heavy limb, digging his cleated boots into the soft outer flesh of the tree and then backhanded sweat from his brow. He checked his belt where the mighty Doublebit hung, its razor edges sheathed in leather. He checked the rope coiled around his waist and the longbow which hung from his back. If the bird came down the trunk at him, he would have either axe or arrow for the fight, but not enough hands for both.

He reached behind his back into his quiver and found but one arrow remained. Having spent three before hitting the Demoneagle, the others must have been lost in the race up the tree, he thought, and he cursed the ill luck. The sun was bright and hot upon his face and his eyes burned from the sweat that would not stay out of them. He thought of the arrows he had lost, but would not look down to see where they lay upon the rocks far below, awaiting his return.

A light wind began to swirl about him, then grew and began to blow steadily out of the East. He leaned against the great Stonepine.

"The breeze feels good," Olin said softly to the tree, "but I don't need the wind up here, pushing at me when I swing my axe. I would rather stay hot than ride the swaying timber with only this rope to hold me. Tell it to stop."

Above him, the bird loosened its grip and took a step down the trunk. Bark soon floated past Olin and he saw that the Demoneagle had moved toward him.

"You are hurting, evil bird!" Olin said loudly. "My arrow did not find your black heart, so you suffer on your perch. I will end your misery, and the misery you have brought to the herdsmen of these mountains."

Olin began to work his way up the narrowing trunk and came within reach of the small branch he had picked for his foothold. Once there, he removed the mighty Doublebit from his belt and threw the leather sheath from its glistening blade. It flashed in the sun as he stuck it into the wood above his head and began to work the rope around the girth of the tree.

Now the Demoneagle saw what Olin meant to do, and realized it had but one chance to topple the Bold Lord before the rope could be tied. One wing was useless but the other still flew and the bird began beating the air with all its remaining strength while hanging onto the narrow crown with its stubborn talons.

The first rush of air blasted the rope from Olin's grasp and he began to lose his hold. Slipping, he reached for the axehandle and caught it with one hand. Then the tree swayed and from the force of the huge bird's wing and the blade came free of the wood. Olin the Bold fell from the heights of the towering Stonepine, Doublebit in one hand and a defiant fistful of bark held high in the other, trailing his fall.

Through the branches he plummeted and tumbled, spun first one way and then another by the protruding limbs, always just out of his grasp. He reached out with the great axe but it caught a thick limb at a crazy angle and twisted in this grip. Faster he fell and his consciousness left him, his mind racing out of reach. Then one ankle found a fork in a stout branch and his boot wedged in the joint as he crashed through the limb, sending needles and twigs exploding in the air. The limb bent downward from the weight of its catch and groaned from the strain, but it held, mere feet above the rocks.

A tired voice moaned through the doorway of a hut, "Timmejoh, I thought I told you to stay out of the apricot tree. You keep hanging from that branch and you'll break it—and you put the kindling hatchet back at the woodpile or you'll be cuttin' your own switch with it. That's the last time I'm warnin' you. Now get down!"

"Ever since that woodcutter, Olin what's-his-name, came through here with his stories..." muttered another, older voice.

Olin the Bold looked at the rocks in front of his face. A switch! He promised himself to be more careful in the future and he lowered himself to the ground. It doesn't take very long for your life to flash before your eyes when you're only eight years old.

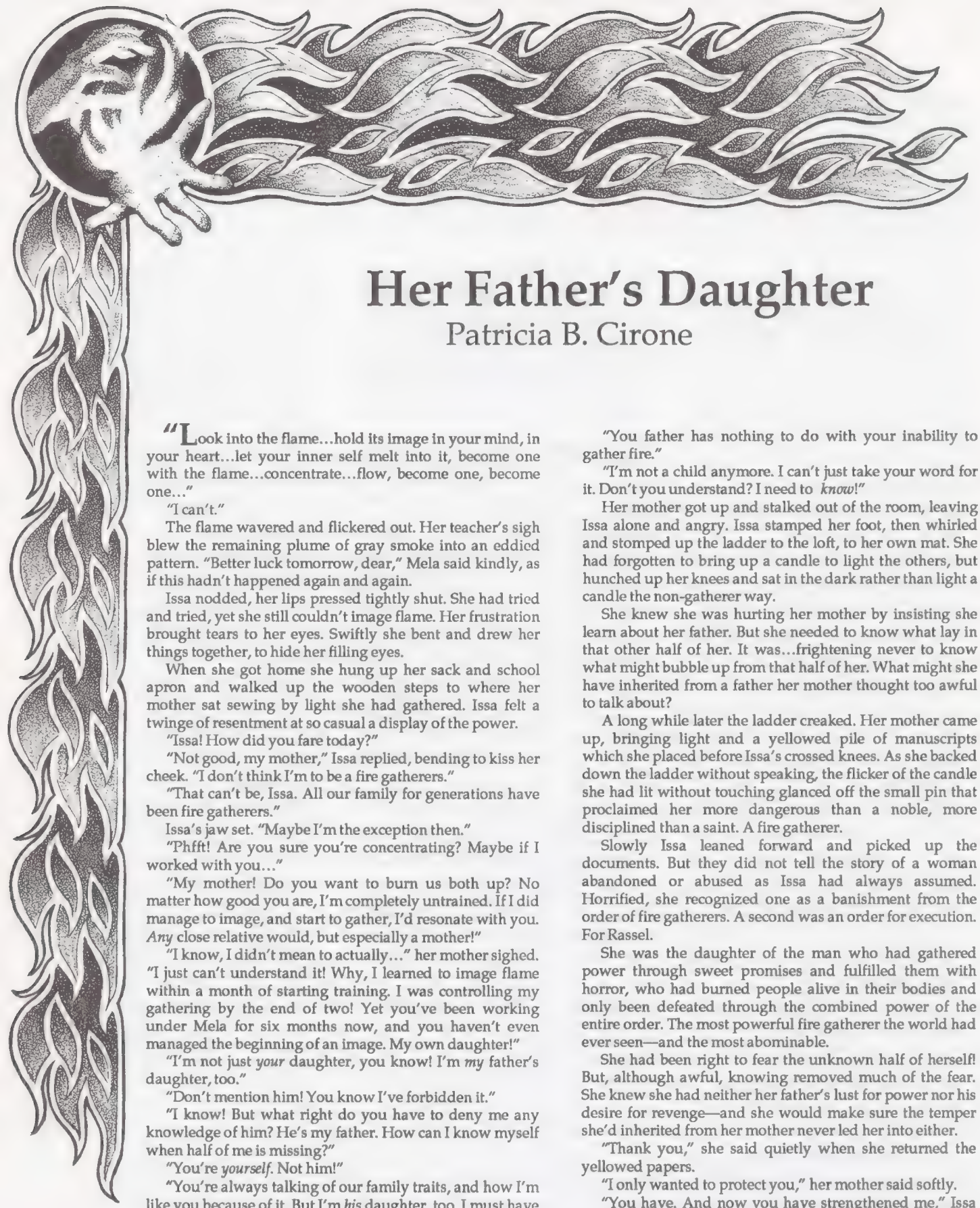
Replacing the mighty Doublebit on the ledge by the door of the woodshed, he hoped for better luck the next time he caught the Demoneagle on the prowl. He vowed to rid the mountains of the terrible bird and went out to look for fresh arrowwood to refill his quiver.

Above his head, a songbird trilled briefly from the top of the apricot tree and he looked up as it hushed and flew away. He gave scant notice to the shadow that flickered past from the wings of a great bird, soaring high against the sun in the updrafts among the gathering thunderheads over the Northwood. ❧

David V. Brinkley :

I have been working as an engraver for nearly eleven years and reside at Sly Park in the Sierra Nevada mountains of Northern California. I have a BA in journalism, vintage L.A. State '69.

I am currently working on a story that is beginning to be taller than my typewriter, and enjoyed taking a break from it to tell a tale in less than 1000 words. This will be my first published work of fiction.



Her Father's Daughter

Patricia B. Cirone

"Look into the flame...hold its image in your mind, in your heart...let your inner self melt into it, become one with the flame...concentrate...flow, become one, become one..."

"I can't."

The flame wavered and flickered out. Her teacher's sigh blew the remaining plume of gray smoke into an eddied pattern. "Better luck tomorrow, dear," Mela said kindly, as if this hadn't happened again and again.

Issa nodded, her lips pressed tightly shut. She had tried and tried, yet she still couldn't image flame. Her frustration brought tears to her eyes. Swiftly she bent and drew her things together, to hide her filling eyes.

When she got home she hung up her sack and school apron and walked up the wooden steps to where her mother sat sewing by light she had gathered. Issa felt a twinge of resentment at so casual a display of the power.

"Issa! How did you fare today?"

"Not good, my mother," Issa replied, bending to kiss her cheek. "I don't think I'm to be a fire gatherers."

"That can't be, Issa. All our family for generations have been fire gatherers."

Issa's jaw set. "Maybe I'm the exception then."

"Phfft! Are you sure you're concentrating? Maybe if I worked with you..."

"My mother! Do you want to burn us both up? No matter how good you are, I'm completely untrained. If I did manage to image, and start to gather, I'd resonate with you. *Any* close relative would, but especially a mother!"

"I know, I didn't mean to actually..." her mother sighed. "I just can't understand it! Why, I learned to image flame within a month of starting training. I was controlling my gathering by the end of two! Yet you've been working under Mela for six months now, and you haven't even managed the beginning of an image. My own daughter!"

"I'm not just *your* daughter, you know! I'm *my* father's daughter, too."

"Don't mention him! You know I've forbidden it."

"I know! But what right do you have to deny me any knowledge of him? He's my father. How can I know myself when half of me is missing?"

"You're *yourself*. Not him!"

"You're always talking of our family traits, and how I'm like you because of it. But I'm *his* daughter, too. I must have traits from his family. Maybe *not* being a fire gatherer is from him."

"You father has nothing to do with your inability to gather fire."

"I'm not a child anymore. I can't just take your word for it. Don't you understand? I need to *know*!"

Her mother got up and stalked out of the room, leaving Issa alone and angry. Issa stamped her foot, then whirled and stomped up the ladder to the loft, to her own mat. She had forgotten to bring up a candle to light the others, but hunched up her knees and sat in the dark rather than light a candle the non-gatherer way.

She knew she was hurting her mother by insisting she learn about her father. But she needed to know what lay in that other half of her. It was...frightening never to know what might bubble up from that half of her. What might she have inherited from a father her mother thought too awful to talk about?

A long while later the ladder creaked. Her mother came up, bringing light and a yellowed pile of manuscripts which she placed before Issa's crossed knees. As she backed down the ladder without speaking, the flicker of the candle she had lit without touching glanced off the small pin that proclaimed her more dangerous than a noble, more disciplined than a saint. A fire gatherer.

Slowly Issa leaned forward and picked up the documents. But they did not tell the story of a woman abandoned or abused as Issa had always assumed. Horrified, she recognized one as a banishment from the order of fire gatherers. A second was an order for execution. For Rassel.

She was the daughter of the man who had gathered power through sweet promises and fulfilled them with horror, who had burned people alive in their bodies and only been defeated through the combined power of the entire order. The most powerful fire gatherer the world had ever seen—and the most abominable.

She had been right to fear the unknown half of herself! But, although awful, knowing removed much of the fear. She knew she had neither her father's lust for power nor his desire for revenge—and she would make sure the temper she'd inherited from her mother never led her into either.

"Thank you," she said quietly when she returned the yellowed papers.

"I only wanted to protect you," her mother said softly.

"You have. And now you have strengthened me," Issa said. She kissed her mother on the cheek and left the room.

The next day, she imaged flame. ❧

The Truth About the Lady of the Lake

Phyllis Ann Karr

"But what am I going to do with it?" Frostflower eyed the sword that the Monarch of Cockaigne had insisted on giving her because, in the Land of Cockaigne, "all women of worship went armed."

Thorn and Frostflower had set out to travel light this time, leaving Dathru's cumbersome and no-longer-needed book at home with Dowl, the dog, in Windslope Retreat; and now the sorceress was reencumbered. "Thorn," she asked, "you are sure that you don't want it?"

"A big, clumsy cowkiller like that?" The swordswoman shook her head. "Slicer's more than good enough for me. Of course, all those gems in the hilt and sheath are nice...No, let's find someplace where it'll bring a high price. Shouldn't be too hard, now that you can control Dathru's Circle."

The sorceress held up the talisman and they reviewed worlds until they found another where warriors dressed up in metal. Anyway, Thorn assumed that the figure lying on a tranquil lakeshore was a warrior taking a nap, with a friend sitting beside to keep watch on their boat. The friend was a whitebeard in a long black robe that looked pretty much like Frost's except for the big silver symbols all over it.

Frostflower smiled. "Another warrior and sorceron team." The two women went through.

No sooner had they stepped out onto the lakeshore than the whitebeard shouted, "Strange powers, avaunt!" and flung up his right arm, pointing his staff at them. A crack of light burst out of it and knocked Frostflower into the middle of the lake. The metal-covered warrior snored on.

"Hey!" said Thorn.

Whitebeard smirked. "I allow no unknown sorcery near my little king. You, it seems, are no sorceress, else would you have been borne into yon water as well."

Thorn aimed a blow at the bogbait, but it bounced off as if the air had hardened around him. So she clanged the flat of Slicer's blade down hard on the sleeping warrior's metal headpiece.

The warrior sat up, still ringing, and opened the mask beneath the cap of the headpiece, revealing a brown-bearded male face. "Zounds?" he cried, fumbling for his sword.

Thorn was sorry she'd wasted time on him. She knew her friend could stay under quite a while by slowing time for her body—if that power worked in this world—but if she tried to hang onto that heavy Cockaigne sword and sheath, too...

"Keep your eye on your demon-addled sorcerer," she told the metalpants. "I'm borrowing your boat." She turned toward it.

"Accursed miscreant, turn again!" The words were scarcely audible over the clanking of metal, but the flat of a blade against the side of Thorn's leg was plain enough.

She whirled back. Metalpants had heaved himself to his feet and was waving his sword at her.

She really didn't have the time. She brought Slicer across with a double-armed smack that she hoped would knock the other warrior's weapon out of his hand. There was a ringing crack as her blade broke his in half. Badly tempered iron.

"Behold!" cried Whitebeard. For half a heartbeat, Thorn thought he was beholding the broken sword. His finger, however, was pointing beyond them to the lake. Turning again, Thorn stared.

Frostflower's arm was holding the Cockaigne sword in its gem-crusted sheath above the surface of the water, the jewels glistening in the sunshine.

"A marvel!" cried Metalpants.

"A token," declaimed Whitebeard.

"A signal," said Thorn, and strode toward the boat.

She heard Whitebeard say, "Nay, sire, let not that one take it first," and then, with clanks and jangles, Metalpants ran past, surprisingly fast on his feet, strongarming Thorn out of the way and jumping into the boat.

"Hey!" she shouted, splashing after him. But the boat was already moving, without oars. It slipped out of her reach and skimmed straight for the arm holding the sword.

Thorn glanced back and saw Whitebeard smirking as he wiggled his hands, obviously using sorcery to control the boat. Maybe she'd have to put him out of action first. Dripping water from the knee down, she charged back up the shore and—

"Behold!" he repeated triumphantly as she was reaching out to knock him down.

She turned to behold. Metalpants was lifting sword and sheath from Frostflowerently as if the burden was a baby. Sounds of almost priestly chanting filled the air from nowhere—more sorcery, of course—as the boat swung around and came back to shore.

Frost poked her head above the surface and watched, grinning mischievously, as Metalpants clanked back up the beach to Whitebeard and the pair of them began marveling at the Cockaigne treasure. "An arm clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," the old man was murmuring persuasively, ignoring the blackness of Frostflower's sleeve with as much determination as he ignored her face, now that it had appeared.

Thorn shrugged and waded out to her friend, finding the water so shallow that Frost was quietly kneeling on the bottom. "With the sorceries they seem to have here," she remarked, "I'm surprised the sword can hold their interest as it's doing."

"Yes, well, jewels that big always dazzle people. Besides, they're scramblebrains."

"I'm afraid we won't be able to get a very high price for it, now," the sorceress apologized.

"That isn't worrying me. I just want to get out of here before they go crazy again."

Frostflower pulled out Dathru's Circle and the friends stepped through into a saner world without even wading ashore. ❧

Phyllis Ann Karr:
Her novels include the widely praised *Frostflower and Thorn* and *Frostflower and Windbourne.* Known also for her short stories, two of which have appeared in prior issues of *MZBFM*, other stories have appeared in: *Space & Time; Vimpires,* an anthology; and *Sword & Sorceress I.* The most recent event in her life was her marriage to Clifton Hoyt. They are in the process of building their dream house in Wisconsin. I suggested that some of us join them for a house warming party – but she declined to give me the address! Congratulation Phyllis and Clifton, may you share many years of life and love together. *jlb*

Uncrossed Stars

Nathan Long

We were at one of those masques old Count Paradin threw every spring to stir up the young people. His is a beautiful house in the Pirazza Hills, with an enormous garden sprinkled with secluded gazebos and arbors perfect for young hearts to spend too much time alone in. The place has an enchantment about it that the romantically susceptible can't resist. And for my mistress at least, the enchantment was working.

"Abry?"

"Mistress?"

"That one on the terrace. The one with the white plumes on his mask. Who is he?"

"By his colors, Mistress, and his companions, I would venture he is a Balanscso, and by his age...probably the second son, Renso."

"He looks at me and I feel that I might faint."

"How unexpected."

"Abry?"

"Nothing, Mistress."

My mistress, Jevina, had insisted that she attend the revel unaccompanied by sisters or cousins, so the family sent me, Abriana D'Vessa, her swordwoman, as chaperon. I was to protect her life, and more importantly, her maidenhood. It was in need of protection.

"Perhaps you should not return his glances, Mistress."

"Oh, but, Abry!"

"He is a Balansco. There is no love lost between your families."

"But he is beautiful! It's too late. Our eyes have met. We have started the stars on their courses and nothing may alter their path."

I snorted. Jevina turned a cold eye on me.

"I sneezed, Mistress; the spring flowers." It was true enough. My nose dislikes the pollens.

Jevina frowned suspiciously, then looked back toward the terrace where the Balansco youth whispered amongst his friends. She pressed a scented kerchief into my palm.

"Take this favor to him, Abry. Quickly."

"Mistress, your parents..."

"I'll tell father about the midnight fencing lessons you gave brother," she snapped. "Then where will you be?"

Hanged is where I would be. Not all fencing in those lessons was done with a sword. I sighed. She had me.

"I go, Mistress. But I'll not speak for the consequences."

And with that I turned and crossed the garden.

It was a dangerous game my mistress played. The blood feud between the Balanscos and the Cuccuros was centuries old. If such a liaison came to light, the streets would once again run with crimson, some of it undoubtedly mine.

Mitigating the danger was the traditional blindness that occluded all eyes at these masques. No matter how unsuccessful the disguise, or how boldly paraded the family colors, it was assumed all masks were perfect and all identities remained secret. So, if Jevina and Renso kept their tryst to this night only, they were reasonably safe. Unfortunately, that possibility was as remote as the unfortuitous stars. If only I could discover a solution.

I crossed the lawn, looking for my opposite number, Renso's escort. It was not my place to approach Renso directly. I must go through his swordman. I found a slight, sly-looking rogue dressed to match his master, chatting in a huddle of sword-hands below the terrace and peeling a peach with a dagger. I strode to him and made a formal bow.

"I have a message for your master."

"How unexpected."

He stood, and with a smirk to his companions, stepped a pace away with me. I showed him the kerchief.

"You know who this is from?"

"I imagine the whole garden knows."

We smiled, but then his face soured and he shook his head sadly. "The fools."

I nodded. "What they would do could bring down both their houses."

He nodded. "What's she like, your mistress?"

"Girlish, romantic. You know the age."

"But under that?"

I grimaced. "I'm glad I'm not him."

"Hmmmm." He seemed lost in thought.

"And him?" I asked.

"Oh, moody, poetical. You know the age."

"But..."

"Vain. He knows he's the prettiest thing in the city."

"Hmmmm."

I looked over at my mistress. She was pointedly looking the other way. Renso's swordman bit into his peach. "So, what think you?"

I turned back to him. "If it be true love, love that will last after the fire of passion dies and will endure hardship and beautify their souls, perhaps then it might be worth the death and grief that would accompany it. But..."

"But it won't be true love. It will be tawdry, messy and last just long enough for the feud to start afresh."

I nodded. "You and I would end up killing each other, and we don't want that."

"No, we don't want that."

He was looking into my eyes, a smirk curling his lips. I looked away, perplexed at the flush rising in my cheeks.

"So what can we do?" I asked.

"Sabotage?"

"Of what sort?"

He shrugged and we both stood, thinking. Suddenly a burst of laughter escaped me. He raised an eyebrow. I smiled.

"I told my mistress I suffered from the pollen, and it's true. It would be nothing for me to raise a sneeze."

I held up the kerchief. He looked puzzled.

"Very amusing, but..."

"Renso won't think so. He'll be outraged. Disgusted. And that will solve our problem. The love will die from his eyes when he finds my gift, and my mistress will be in a cold fury when she sees what he does with her favor. It's perfect."

He grinned. "To think a sneeze might stop a massacre. Madame, I am in full accord. Let us step behind this hedge."

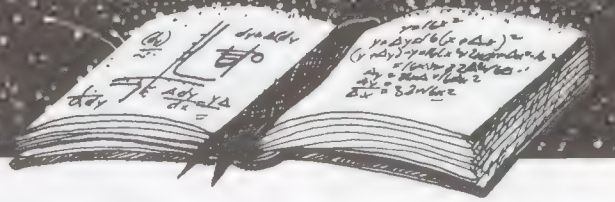
We moved out of sight and I blew my nose. He took the soiled favor with dainty fingers and again favored me with his wicked smile. "Perhaps later, Madame, we can discuss a safer union between our houses."

Mayhap the Count's garden truly is enchanted, for instead of stalking away as I would have another night, I reached out, took his peach, and, my eyes never leaving his, bit deep into its juicy meat. He stepped forward, but I motioned him toward his master.

"Duty first," I said, and then slowly sauntered away, eating his peach as I went. ❧

Mathemagics

Patricia Duffy Novak



Kyria pushed the heavy book away with a loud sigh. Lilla, her roommate, looked up from her own scribblings and frowned slightly.

"It's no use," Kyria said, rising from behind her desk and stretching her cramped legs. "There's no way I'll pass the test."

"You don't try very hard," said Lilla acidly and returned to her own work, long blonde hair curtaining her face from Kyria's view.

Kyria said nothing. There was too much truth in what Lilla had said. Unlike Lilla, Kyria hated math. Last year, she had barely made it through first-year Calculus. This Vector Calculus was impossible. It made no sense at all.

"You'll be expelled if you don't pass." Lilla's voice emerged from under the mop of hair. Kyria glared, but Lilla took no notice.

"There has to be a better way to cast spells than calculating the flux of energy fields." Kyria continued. "Think about it, Lilla. Think about all the ancient wizards. Calculus wasn't even invented until the twentieth century."

Lilla rolled her eyes. "The seventeenth."

Kyria shrugged. "Who cares? Merlin, Morgana, Dayfed of Oran–any of them have Calculus tests? There must be another way. Why doesn't one of our time traveling faculty members find out how they did it and teach that instead of these wretched theorems."

Lilla dropped her pencil. "Use your head for once. Think how many years we have to spend in college learning how to tap vector fields. However they learned magic back then, it probably wasn't any easier. None of the time travelers wants to spend four or five more years in school. What would be the point when our own methods work so well?"

Work so well for you, Kyria wanted to reply, but she held her tongue. There was no point discussing anything with Lilla. The other girl was simply besotted with math. "I'm going out for a while," Kyria said.

"Good." Lilla went back to her problem set.

Kyria walked around the grounds of Salem University, her struggles with Green's Theorem almost forgotten. She would do it. She would go back into the past and learn the old methods of magic, the ones without Calculus. But how? How to cast the spell when she was so hopelessly inept at calculating flux? Lilla could probably set the spell correctly, but little Miss Nose-in-Book would probably think it was a stupid idea.

How then? Kyria sat down on a cold metal bench and watched the autumn leaves swirl gently in the light breeze. Who would help her? She wasn't on very good terms with her fellow students, who considered her lazy and irresponsible. Certainly none of the faculty would help her. She paused and started to smile. That wasn't quite right. The faculty would not willingly help her sneak into the past, but there were indirect ways to get what she needed. She jumped up, still smiling, and made her way to the library.

Monday morning at nine o'clock Kyria hovered in the doorway of Professor Sanchez's office, pages of scribbled equations in her hand. She knew the spell described was all wrong, that her calculations were not even remotely correct, but that wouldn't matter. Not if she had old Sanchez pegged correctly.

"Excuse me, Professor."

Sanchez looked up from his desk and squinted at her for a moment. "What is it, Kyria?"

"I'm having some trouble with Vector Calculus. I need to do some extra credit work if I'm going to pass. I know you're busy, but can I have just a few minutes of your time?"

"Of course." Sanchez indicated a small wooden chair on the other side of his desk, which Kyria took. "Now let me see what you've got there... Mmmm, I'm afraid you're pretty far off." He wrote busily for several minutes, then handed the marked-up pages back to Kyria. "Try that."

"Thank you, Professor." Kyria beamed. If it had not been for Dr. Sanchez's habit of redoing the entire problem when a student missed something, she would never have

Sanchez's spell worked perfectly, transporting Kyria to the fifth century. She stood now before the desk of the venerable Oswy, chief wizard of the Gleawanceaster Academy. She had already made her petition to join the scholars there, had demonstrated what few magical tricks she could muster, and now awaited the old man's answer. She prayed fervently that he would accept her; she had no way to get back home. If the Academy refused her admittance, she would have to spend a wretched lifetime herding cows or doing something equally unpleasant and agricultural.

"Will you study hard and do your lessons well?" Oswy asked in a surprisingly mild voice.

"Yes, sir."

The expression in Oswy's hard blue eyes softened. He laid a gnarled hand on a large leather-bound volume lying open on his desk. "The secrets to the great powers are in this book. Tomorrow you will begin your study. Now, go and join the other female novices in the West Tower."

Late that night, after a cold supper and an even colder bath, Kyria lay sleepless on a mat in the room she shared with four other students. Curiosity tormented her. What was in Oswy's book? Surely, it would not be too serious a matter if she sneaked a look?

She made her way cautiously down the tower steps and into the main hall of the castle. She came to Oswy's study. She entered and held up the great book so that it was illuminated by the wavering light of a torch.

With difficulty, she picked her way through two or three pages of the ancient document. Then she stopped, closed the volume, and with sinking spirits, put it back on the desk. Lilla was wrong; all the historians were wrong. Calculus wasn't invented in the seventeenth century. It was much older than that. Kyria cast a last despairing glance at the leather-bound volume on Oswy's desk, and then stumbled back up the stairs to the tower. The language in the book was archaic, the symbols somewhat strange, but she had no doubt at all that the ancient and mysterious book was a Calculus text. ❧

Better Sight

L.D. Woeltjen

Calvin's eyes peered at me through pinched slits, squinting not from failing sight alone, but from the ever-present pain. Bony fingers reached out to stroke my face. I hoped his touch wouldn't stray across the tear's trail that moistened my check.

"I have something for you," I whispered.

Reaching reverently into my jacket pocket, I found the magic bundle and pulled the spectacles loose. The charge of stored energy bristled against my fingers much like soda pop bubbles on the tongue.

Calvin leaned forward, eyelids parted with interest.

"What's that?"

"You can see them?" I asked. The grin on Calvin's face gave me hope. I jumped up, eager to put the glasses on him.

"You may not approve," I said, "but I was ready to try anything to make you better. God didn't seem interested, so I turned to the fairy folk. After writing about them so many years, keeping them alive in this techno-ridden world, I figured they owed me a favor. "

I told him how, as I sat in the waitng room, I'd tried summoning fairy aid with my mind. I dozed off and dreamed of the cobbler's elves, only in the dream they weren't making shoes. When I woke up, the glasses lay in my lap.

"These remind me of the ones you wore in college," I said as I held the glasses up. The square, slightly concave lenses were mounted in frail gold wire frames. Carefully, I hooked them around his ears and let the glasses settle onto the narrow ridge of his nose. Calvin just smiled.

Fairy folk, I prayed silently, *let him see.* Somehow I'd hoped that the eyes being the door to the brain meant complete healing would start with restoring his vision.

"In the dream, the elves said the glasses would give better sight," I complained when no miracle occurred.

"Maybe they weren't meant for me," he suggested. Calvin was always very spiritual, one ear ever open to God. To him, even faery was part of his Creator's domain.

Perhaps the glasses were meant for me. A crazy image flashed into my desperate mind. I'd read of healers who reached into people's bodies and bare-handedly pulled tumors out. Would the spectacles help me remove the growth which was destroying Calvin's brain? I tried them on, and they hummed with power, but nothing happened.

"Maybe it wasn't time to use them," Calvin said as he reached out and took my hand.

"You know, Pat," he said softly, "I've spent my whole life seeking the world beyond ours. Now, the sicker I am, the more real I become there. That's why the glasses were visible to me when everything else is hazy. I've walked too long in that other world to want to come back. It's selfish I suppose." He squeezed my fingers limply, then lay back.

"It is selfish," I said, angered that he would want to desert me. "I don't want to live without you."

"We'll be together there, someday," Calvin promised, "and I'm not abandoning you. Though a sort of greyness hides one world from the other, I'll always be nearby."

Those were his last words to me, and I clung to them. The day of the funeral, I carried the glasses in a pocket where I could touch them for reassurance. I should have been pleased by the crowd that came to say goodby.

Calvin had tended the sick, counseled the sorrowing, fed the poor and visited the lonely. I ignored them now, resenting the time he'd spent with them. Staring off at the forest that edged the cemetary, I imagined Calvin dancing with fairy folk among the trees. If only I could see him.

The glasses! I pulled them out and donned them with shaking hands. Though I searched the trees, I saw nothing. Still hoping, I scanned the mourners, thinking Calvin might be trying to offer comfort even from the world beyond. Instead, I saw shiny dots.

I blinked, then refocused, but bright golden spots still covered everyone. It looked like a supernatural measles epidemic. The face of the woman beside me was freckled with irregular circles, so were her arms and hands.

I held my own hand up. At first, it looked as if it was overlaid with gold. But, as I inspected it, I made out individual spots. I peered at one, bringing my palm right up to my nose. The spot was not solid, but filled with whorling lines. A fingerprint.

"Are you all right, Pat?" asked the woman next to me.

"Yes," I answered, polite in spite of the distraction.

"Well," she said shyly, "I just wanted you to know that, well, Calvin isn't really gone. I mean, he's touched so many of us..."

Though I'd tried to tune her out, her words stunned me. Feeling instant kinship, I gave the woman a big hug.

"I know Calvin was very concerned about you and your children. If there's ever anything I can do," I told her with complete sincerity, "please call on me."

Moving among the crowd, I offered similar invitations to the people I'd so recently resented. They seemed like family now and helping them made me happy. I only wished I'd shared Calvin's good works while he lived...

In the months and years that followed, I knew we'd draw closer, our lost loved one with us whenever we gathered. While I alone could actually see it, we all bore Calvin's imprint. ❧

The Balance

Vera Nazarian

The world's greatest wizard, Liir, having reached the pinnacle of his learning, decided one day to view the ultimate mystery, having cast a trinity of mighty spells that whisked him out of his earthly body and his present state of existence, he—or at that point, to be precise, the entity—found him/her/itself in a space and time continuum unlike any that human words can describe. Amidst the pulsing vibrant energy of a cosmic nebula that was the universe, Liir saw the Male Principle and the Female Principle, both represented to him in their respective human shapes, locked in a great eternal embrace/struggle. Liir perceived this struggle with an awe that only the wise of the highest degree can experience.

What a marvel, what a sublime paradox, the entity mused, that the universal balance hinges upon this eternal strife! Neither of the Two shall ever give way before the other, or else all crumbles in an abysmal apocalypse! What an inconceivable thought! And yet, Liir thought, how perfect is the universe—for these two great Principles are absolutely equal in strength, and nothing shall ever come to outweigh the balance of One in favor of the Other.

In that cosmic instant, the Man, noticing all of a sudden that They were being observed, paused in his divine Struggle, and turned His radiant god-visage to their entity.

Liir thought he distinctly heard these words:

"What's this? Who are you, mortal?"

It was at that point that the Woman, having found the way clear before Her mighty fist, knocked the Man out with one perfectly aimed divine blow. ❧

The Lucky Leprechaun

Mark O'Connor

"Please explain for the court what happened, Mr. Nathan," his nattily-attired lawyer said.

Nevin Nathan shifted nervously in the witness box, his attention divided between his lawyer, the judge, and the cherubic leprechaun who sat happily beside his own lawyer, seemingly unaffected by the proceedings.

"Really," Nevin began, "this whole sorry mess has gone on far too long because it is a very simple matter."

He stood up and pointed an accusing finger at the leprechaun, who widened his smile appreciably at the attention.

"I captured the little bugger..."

"Objection," objected the defense. "'Bugger' is a denigrating term.

"Objection sustained. Continue, Mr. Nathan. Without some of your more colorful descriptions, if you would?"

"I captured him and the rules are that when you capture a leprechaun they have to grant you three wishes," Nevin whined.

"I see," his lawyer said, his tie temporarily blinding his client. "And did he grant you three wishes?"

"No, he did not."

"Aha!" his lawyer exclaimed, leaping and twirling in the air and landing in a crouched karate stance, facing Mr. Leprechaun.

"Ahem," the judge said, motioning to Mr. Nathan. "Could we please proceed?"

"Oh, sure thing," the lawyer said, turning back to his disconcerted client. The lawyer, the only one Nevin could get to take on his case, gave him the 'A– OK" sign, that the case was in the briefcase. Nevin squirmed in his seat. He didn't feel the case was going well at all.

"Mr. Nathan, did he grant you any wishes?"

"Yes, two," Nevin said.

"Two," his lawyer said, holding up two fingers for all to see.

"Inflation," said the leprechaun.

"Inflation, smation, your Honor," said the prosecutor. "Let the record show that two is one less than three."

"Yes, yes," the judge said. "Get on with it."

"Mr. Nathan, what was your first wish?" the lawyer asked.

"I wished for a beautiful wife." Nevin smiled at the memory.

"Could you please explain for the court what happened?" his lawyer said. He glanced at the judge and mouthed the words, "Wait till you hear this."

The judge couldn't hide his amazement at the lawyer's audacity...and bad breath. He pulled out a can of aerosol freshener and gave the area in front of the bench a few quick sprays.

"My wife was very beautiful," Nevin said. "She had fine golden hair that fell to her waist, skin like alabaster, and lips so soft..." His loving smile turned to a twisted sneer. "But she was frigid! He ripped me off!"

"Objection," objected the defense's counsel. "Beauty is only skin deep."

"Sustained," the judge said. He gave Nevin a fatherly look. "Beauty really is only skin deep."

"Your Honor, could we please...?" Nevin's lawyer asked.

"Yes, yes, of course," the judge said.

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Nathan, could you please tell the court what your second wish was?"

"I wished for a million dollars," Nevin said.

"And did you get a million dollars?"

"Well, yes. But it was a taxable receipt, and it was invested in the stock market, which crashed. When my wife got through with the divorce, there was hardly any money left."

"Hey, you didn't tell me that!" Nevin's lawyer complained. "Now how are you going to pay me?"

"You're out of order," the judge declared, pounding his gavel. "Is there anything else you'd like to add, Mr. Nathan?" he asked.

"Yes," Nathan said, head bowed like a broken man. "For five years now I've been after the lucky leprechaun to grant my third wish, which he flatly refuses to do. Have you any idea how many years it took to capture him? You can't imagine how frustrating it was, all those near misses, and days and weeks on end of chasing him.

"And bringing him to justice is another story altogether. Do you know what it takes to get a leprechaun extradited? The Irish are very protective people, I'll have you know. I was threatened by the I.R.A. and the Irish National Historical Society. Even Greenpeace sent me a nasty letter. Apparently leprechauns are a protected species.

"Then there have been the endless delays: lawyers suddenly becoming ill, judges dying, new trial dates—oh, the list goes on. And the publicity is unbearable. I'm getting hate mail. I'm destitute. My wife is gone. My friends have deserted me. My life is a shambles." He threw his hands on his head. "I just wish this was over."

Nevin felt like Wile E. Coyote scrambing back for the ledge of the canyon.

"I –I –I mean..."

"Case dismissed," the judge said. ❧

The Lucky Leprechaun and *Turbo Charged*

Mark O'Connor is a twenty-nine-year-old accountant who claims his days are numbered. He lives in Calgary, Alberta (Canada) and loves to write during the cold, dark, winter days on the tundra. He has been writing for seven years and has been previously published in *Ouroboros*. Other stories are scheduled to appear in *Starsong* ,and *Tense Moments* ,during 1990.

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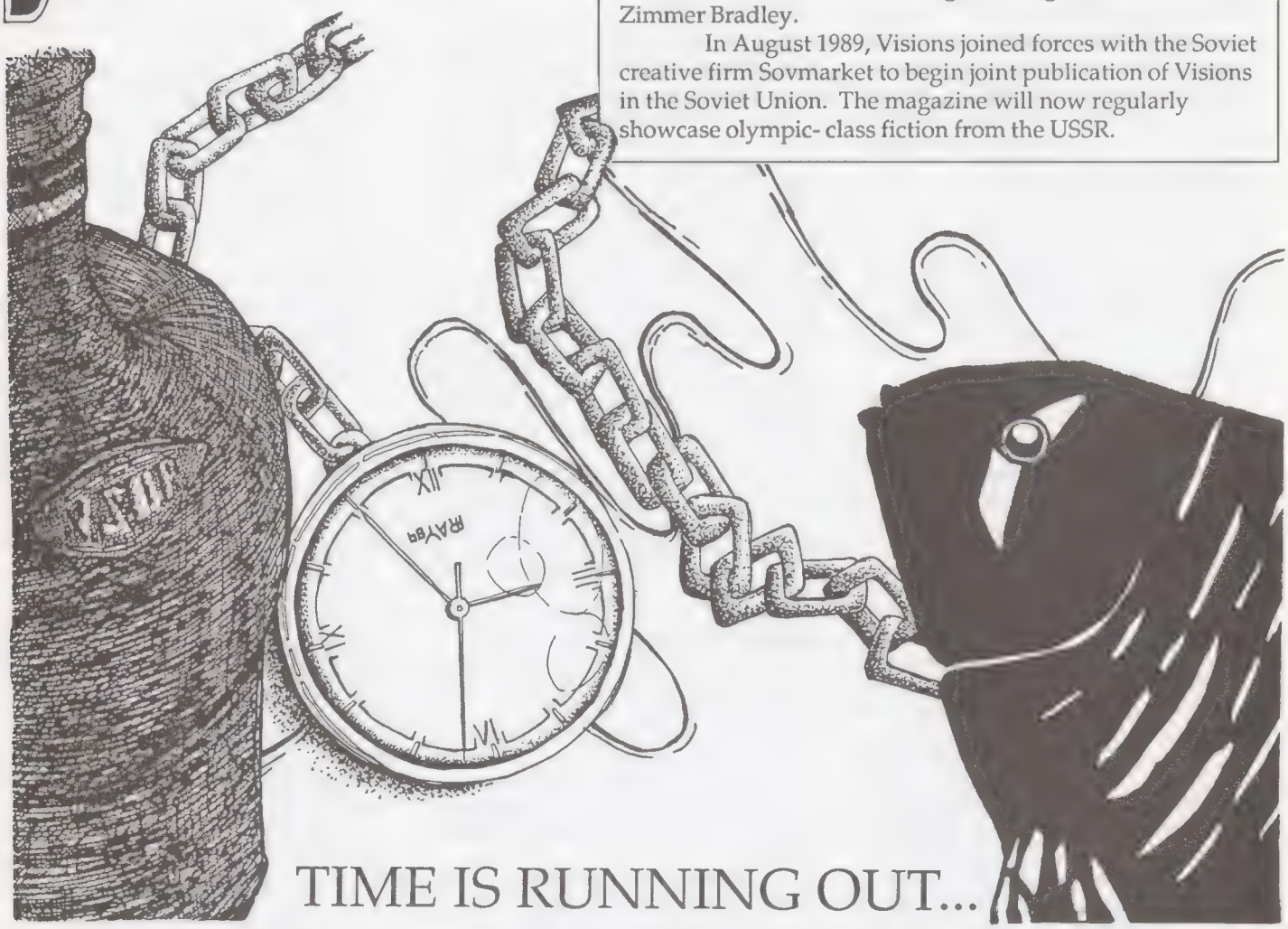

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BEFORE NO. 1 ISSN 0899 - 4919

Weather Witch

Elisabeth Waters

It was all Peter's fault. If he hadn't given me *How to Become a Witch in 12 Easy Lessons* for my birthday, none of this would have happened. And he didn't want to weed the vegetable garden yesterday.

Well, maybe some of it was my fault, too. I didn't want to weed the garden either; it's really not a fun way to spend a beautiful Saturday morning. And I am nearly two years older than Peter, and Dad is always saying that a big sister should set a good example for her little brother. And I was the one who looked up at a sky with only a couple of puffy little clouds high up in it and remarked, "Gee, if it were raining, we wouldn't be able to weed the garden."

Peter's face lit up, the way it always does when he gets one of his bright ideas. His "bright" ideas always get us into trouble we could never have imagined when he came up with them, and if I'd had any sense at all I'd have run for the garden and started weeding.

"Jane, I'm pretty sure there's a rain-making spell in that book I gave you."

I guess I don't have much sense, because I followed Peter up to my room and helped him look for the book. He was the one who found it, shoved it under my bed with eight other books I'm supposedly reading, including my history textbook and two library books -- one overdue, one miraculously not.

As advertised, the book was divided into 12 lessons, and it did say on the first page to do them in order. But Weather Magic was Lesson 7, and we didn't have time to do lessons 1 through 6 and still make it start raining before Dad found us goofing off.

So we took the book and went outside to our favorite place down by the stream where we hide when we don't want to do chores. Bruce, our collie, followed us, but he just lay down and went to sleep, so he wasn't in our way. Peter held the book and told me what to say and I cast the spell. I think I did just what the book said to, and Peter says I did, too. And at least part of it must have been right, because it did rain. But, honest, the book said "rain", not "tornado"!

I was standing there with my eyes scrunched closed, concentrating on making it rain, when Bruce started whimpering and scrambled to his feet. I opened my eyes to see what was bothering him, and saw all those dark grey clouds piling up. I yelped, Peter looked up from the book , and the wind hit the tops of the trees with a great rushing roar. We ran for the storm shelter under the barn as fast as we possibly could and made it just as the storm hit. I got pretty wet during the last few seconds before Dad, who had been watching anxiously for us, got the door closed behind me.

Peter was smart enough to hide the book under his shirt before Dad saw it, and Dad was so relieved we were safe that he didn't ask too many qeustions about where we had been and what we'd been doing that we didn't notice the storm coming sooner.

It was a pretty bad storm, but at least nobody got killed or badly hurt, and most of the crops are okay. But it went straight through the place where we cast the spell, and only missed our house by about ten yards!

Today is a beautiful day, with not a single cloud in a billiant blue sky. And as soon as I finish cleaning up the vegetable garden and weeding what's left of it, I'm going to take that book, starting with Lesson 1, and read it very, very carefully.❧

Honorable Mention:

As Marion has frequently complained - typeface is inelastic. There were eight stories that were all set in type and held to the very last *minute* in hopes that they would fit. We would like to recognize these talented authors- keep any eye out for their stories :

Greg Beatty *The Beetle and the Butterfly*
Stephen Crane Davidson *The Dance*
Jimm Gall *Cat Employed*
Linda Gordon *Neighborhood Watch*
Kevin Murphy *A Cup of Honeysuckle*
Rima Sarat (Mary Anne Landers) *Rosemary for Remembrance*
Steve Rasnic Tem *Presage*
Brenda Ward *Lander*

I wanted to send certificates of Honorable Mention but Jan's already overworked and hasn't gotten to it yet.–*MZB*

Moon Lighting

Douglas L. Hulick

The curtains parted and a figure dressed in expensive silks stepped through. I sat at the table, beckoned him to be seated before me.

"I would have you do a reading for me," said Lord Ayshin.

I studied the man in front of me for a moment, then nodded. He placed a silver coin in my palm. I secreted it in my robes, then sighed. The incense was giving me a headache.

"What is it you wish to know, most noble lord?" I asked in a creaking voice. Damn his hide.

Ayshin cleared his throat as he placed both of his hands on the table. "We are alone and unheard?"

I nodded. "Of course, my lord. None shall know what takes place here."

He relaxed somewhat, his broad shoulders sagging with relief. Still, I noticed that his fingers picked nervously at the multicolored cloth that covered the table.

"Excellent. I am about to undertake an important venture. I would like to know if the signs of the heavens are favorable."

I chuckled inside the shadow of my hood. "And the nature of this venture?"

"I cannot say."

"But it does involve another's death."

Ayshin sat up straight, his face pale. "Yes."

It was fortunate that my face was in shadow, for if noble Lord Ayshin had seen my expression at that moment, he surely would have fled. That would not have been desirable.

"Very well. I will read the ether for death."

I reached beneath the table and withdrew a black sphere: an Olsad crystal, used only by a master scryer. The globe fit into a small depression in the table, halfway between myself and Ayshin. I peered into the orb.

Ayshin's fingers were trembling at the corner of my vision as I began to speak.

"Dark. Dark happenings wander the future."

"Tell me what you read, Scryer!" His voice was low, anxious.

"Death," I replied. "Death for one of the high-born. Soon, very soon."

Ayshin let out his breath. His fingers relaxed on the colored cloth. I waited a moment before I continued.

"Tonight."

"Tonight?" he gasped. "But that's not possible! He's not meant to..."

I lifted my hands. "That is what I see, my lord."

"Could you be wrong?"

My hands came to rest on the colored cloth. "I am never wrong," I said flatly.

Reflexes are a wonderful thing. When I pulled on the table covering and sent the black globe rolling towards the confused noble, his first reaction was to catch the thing. His second was to drop it, but by then it was too late. The sphere, while resembling an Olsad globe, was, in fact, a little device of my own design that split in two when not handled correctly. The viper inside struck instantly. Lord Ayshin died within seconds.

I rose from the table and stripped off the musty fortune teller's clothes I had been wearing over my own garments. Putting on a pair of protective gloves, I recovered the small blue and yellow serpent from Ayshin's lap and returned it to the globe. The resealed device went into my pouch. I draped the noble's face with a black handkerchief, my one deference to drama.

The body of the dead fortune teller whose place I had taken was behind another partition in the tent. I returned his clothes to him before I left through a slit in the canvas. Dark alleys and not-so-dark thoroughfares embraced my flight. Doorway after doorway passed by on either side before I stopped at the indistinct shadow of a gateway. An iron key passed me through the barrier and into the tunnels that ran beneath the city. I walked for several minutes in the damp, permanent night, counting my steps until I reached the number that told me there was a hidden stairway to my left. Another key, also iron, gained me access to this hidden section of the catacombs. I climbed until the stair ended at a landing. A small slice of light shone from beneath a single door. The two previous keys, plus a small brass one from inside my shirt, unlocked the portal.

I stepped into a sizeable room containing several large cabinets and a number of weapon racks. After locking the door behind me, I deposited the snake in a small cage and returned the globe to its place within a bureau. A new wardrobe sat where I had placed it across a chair earlier. Following a quick wash and change of garments, I essayed another hidden staircase and passage, finally emerging from behind a hinged pillar into my bedroom. I moved over to my desk, sat down, and waited.

It was not a long wait. Five minutes after I had settled myself I heard the tapping of booted feet in the hallway outside my room, followed by a discreet knock at my door.

"Come," I called, lifting a paper so I could set it down again when my visitor entered.

A man dressed in dark blues and burgundy entered the room, a pair of soldiers behind him. All three bowed.

"You Majesty," said Count Gelsing. "I have grave news."

"Being?"

"Lord Ayshin, Chancellor of the Realm, is dead at the hands of an assassin."

I managed to look shaken. "How?"

"Poison, sire. The fiend used a viper to slay Ayshin. The body was found a short while ago in the tent of a fortune teller. The assassin killed the scryer as well, I fear."

I shook my head in what I hoped appeared to be disbelief. "Ayshin murdered? This is unbelievable."

The Count grunted his agreement. "Would you prefer to be left alone, sire?"

I shook my head once more. "No. No, thank you. Please...stay a while."

He did, and after the guards had left, I poured us both some wine.

"Well, one thing for sure," said Count Gelsing as he picked up his goblet. "We shall never know if the rumors about Ayshin plotting against your life were founded in truth."

"No, probably not," I replied. I lifted my glass in silent triumph. Gelsing joined me, no doubt in honor of the dead. I, however, toasted death. ❧

Marion Zimmer Bradley
TALKS TO WRITERS

Lope di Vega - in a Spanish play that I translated once I found this line...
" God hears short prayers just as well as long ones."

So why did I want to do a short-short issue? One idea that I want to share with people while I'm still around to do it, is that a short-short gives in pure form everything I feel about fiction. After 50 years, more or less, in this business I have seen that it is too easy to cover up an idea with wordage in a three volume novel. You can't do that with a short-short. In planning a short-short you have to know what you are thinking, confront it, and say it precisely –the secret of good writing is to simplify, simplify, simplify, relentlessly– I cannot repeat that often enough. In a short-short, there's no room to talk all around the subject.

One of my big problems – I should only have more such problems– is the writer who is, basically, trying to write a novel in 6,000 words. Granted there's more art to telling a long story than a short-short, sometimes you really need more room and shouldn't confine yourself. My second novelette in F&SF, *The Climbing Wave*, started as an 8,000 word novelette: Tony Boucher, God rest him, suggested it could stand expansion, and I think it finally saw print at 30,000 words. (There are few markets for this length now a days.) So if you want to write a novel, I suggest you go ahead and write the novel. Even then you may wind up with 14 times as much as you can use. Diana Paxson's first novel eventually broke down to 5 novels.

I suggest you write out your story as a short-short first, that way you'll know what it's about and more especially *who* it's really about. Ideas must be communicated through the characters embodying the story. A story can be one page long or one book long or half a dozen books long, though personally I think that's dirty pool. But basically it's communicating the idea through means of a character. Every book from *Gone With the Wind* to *The Hunt for Red October* is a plot line expressed through one main character.

Every novel (even War and Peace) boils down to basics; to one character's attempt to live and do well, which assumes that he will prosper and that good will win out over evil. (Blame the Greeks, it all started out with the Odyssey. One person's attempt to live and do well against everything the Gods, the Trojans and the weather can throw at him.)

Every story you'll read (as well as all those you'll never get around to) has the same plot - at least I can't think of any exceptions offhand (if you can I'd be interested to find out).

So when you start writing a story, the first thing you do is create a character. Then you figure out what problem he has got to overcome. Think of your own favorite stories - it's good practice for any would be writer to analyze stories and see how are put together. Do this half a dozen times a day, not to mention analyzing all your own favorites. That's the difference between a reader and a writer. You'll get to where you don't enjoy reading so much, or perhaps you'll enjoy it differently, but that goes with the territory.

Before you write anything, decide what you're trying to do. In other words- "put brain in gear before engaging typewriter". That's really all there is to it - that and practice.

I really shouldn't have to say this again – I've been saying it in every issue so far, but as my co-editor points out every mail still brings me a new load of space-ship stories (which is not what I want) or stories with no focus.

That's what Parke Godwin was saying in the last issue, and he hit the nail right on the head with his title "No Nice Way To Put It" – that people who write have to focus on what they're doing. Once they figure out what they're doing, they just do it.

Basically education is finding out for yourself what everybody else has been trying to tell you all along. I guess every generation has to find it out for themselves. But after all, what do you have to loose. I'm here to say it *can* be done.

You can read articles for a life time, but in the last analysis you have to stop reading and start doing.–*MZB*

Writers Talk Back:

We noticed that there are a number of letters to the editor specifically related to writng, rejection, etc.., and may not be of general interest to our readership as a whole, but may be of interest to our writers - so here it is a column just for you.

Rejection Letters...

Mary Anne Landers/Rima Saret, Russelville, Arkansas 72801
Dear Ms. Burke:
Though I can't speak for all would-be contributors to MZB's FANTASY MAGAZINE, I want to assure Ms. Bradley that there's no need for her to be so apologetic in the rejection letters she sends me. A few days ago I received one in which she went to great lengths to

explain that she means her criticism to be constructive and that she's not telling me all this because she can't stand me and wants to get rid of me. Well, I appreciate the gesture, but it's not necessary.

I write so prolifically and have so many manuscripts in submission that I receive an average of one rejection every mailing day. (*You're going about it the right way. MZB.*) I think it's safe to state that by now I'm used to them.

As for criticism, I can always use it, both positive and negative -- especially when it somes from someone as knowledgeable and experienced in writing as Bradley. Authors who are interested in improving their work already realize the value of feedback.

The only times I object are when so-called criticism gets personal and constitutes condescension or rudeness. If an editor states in a rejection letter, "This story is stupid," that's criticism. If he states, "This story is stupid and so are you," that's insult. Good editors criticize writings; bad ones criticize writers. Good-sport writers know the difference.

Dear Mary Anne:

If you deal with enough editors/people in this business, you'll find the difference between the good, the bad and the great floods of mediocre.

Are We Doing Our Part ???

Lorina J. Stephens
Ontario,Canada
Dear Ms. Bradley,

The facts: writers and publishers are large consumers of paper and paper products. In an average household, fine paper comprises two percent of total garbage output. In a writer's house I expect that percentage is more than double.

Forest fall to produce paper, which isn't a problem of itself except when world class old forests are harvested, and when reforestation isn't part of the logging mandate. In Canada, an area the size of Vancouver Island is cut every four years, just for fine paper. Couple that to the fact most cuts are clear cuts, not selected harvests, and that often up to 50 percent of that harvest is left as waste because the wood is considered unsuitable for the pulp and paper industry. This extravagant waste of natural resources compounds in the production of paper. Mills directly co-intribute to the contamination of water systems and the atmosphere.

A partial soilution: As a writer and mother I feel I have an ethical responsiblilty, as well as a responsibility to my own survival, to do something about my own paper consumption. All fine paper in our household and in our business is now recycled. That coupled with the recycling of glass, tin and plastic bottles has reduced a four bag a week output to one and a half bags a week.

As of January 1, 1990, I have begun to use recycled, unbleached paper. There will likely be some resistance from editors who receive my work, however, there has been no unfavourable reaction yet. I simply include a brief, explanatory note in my covering letters. Surely any person with conscience will support my commitment.

A challenge: to writers, agents and publishers. If I can make the effort to do something meaningful for our environment, surely you can. So, my challenge is as follows: to writers, I challenge you to recycle fine paper and switch to unbleached recycled paper for all your work.

To agents, the same, but also to put pressure upon the publishing industry to start printing on recycled and/or acid free papers, with vegetable inks. Why not negotiate a contract not only for a better advance and better royalties, but also for an environmentally friendly publication?

To publishers: the same as writers, but to also consider a submission on recycled paper as a professional submission. Unbleached recycled paper is easy on the eyes. If that is coupled with a commitment to produce publications on recycled paper and with vegetable inks, then something substantial can be done to preserve the entire planet.

Why do this? Besides the preservation of the planet? It's good business sense. Every tonne of recycled papers produced saves 17 trees. Recycled papers require 50 percent less energy to produce than virgin paper. Recycled paper results in 35 percent less water pullution and uses 60 percent less water than the manufacture of virgin paper. The manufacture of recycled paper results in 75 percent less air pollution. Every tonne of recycled paper produced eliminates the need for three cubic metres of landfill.

I hope you will join me in a step toward continuity.

Dear Lorina: As long as we can read what's on a piece of paper we're happy to oblige. We will look into using a magazine paper that's recyclable. Thank you for letter and your committment to helping us all help ourselves. MZB,jlb

Romance...

James M. Hartley Jr.
Poughkeepsie, NY
Dear Ms. Bradley:

Thank you for the quick response on my story. Sorry it wasn't what you were looking for, but that happens.

However, I find I am a little confused by your comments, and I was hoping you could take a few minutes and claify them. One point was the distinction between science fiction and fantasy. I always figured if the hero's friend Prof. Blivit invented a time machine and he went back to save the girl it was SF, if the ghost took him back in time by "supernatural" means it was fantasy. Are you using a different definition, or are you just more concerned with "feel" and "language?" *(You've got it, James. MZB.)*

The other point was your classification of the story as "romance." Does any minimal amount of boy-girl interest make it romance? I have one story in which a Wizard and his young female apprentice battle to save a kingdom from an evil enchantment, at the end they discover they are in love. Is this a romance? I always thought "romance" was all those Barbara Cartland and Harlequin books my mother-in-law used to read, and I don't think my story got anywhere near that. Again, I simply don't understand the definitions you are using, and would like to know so I can avoid submitting unsuitable material in the future.

Thank you for you consideration.

Dear James: Romance storyline: Boy meets girl and either boy gets girl or loses girl. Decoration for fantasy element but must be a good plot. Fantasy/Romance: 80/20; 60/40; over 50/50 –you're skating on thin ice. It's all in the general impression the story gives.–MZB

How Does It Feel...

Kathleen M. Massie Ferch
Verona, WI
Dear Ms. Bradley,

It was very exciting seeing my story in the last issue. It took me about two days to calm down enough to read the other stories, and about four days before I got to mine. Normally, I read the entire issue the first night I get the magazine. Somehow, it still doesn't seem real; that I managed to get something published. I have hundreds of geologic reports published, but it's just not the same.

Dear Kathy, It feels wonderful when you finally get there. –MZB

The Room with the Moa that We're Not Suppose to Write About

K. Huebner

"Moa, the Maori name of the extinct, flightless, ostrichlike birds comprising the New Zealand order Dinornithiformes *(see* Bird*). In the North Island the moas seem to have died out about 500-700 years ago, probably before the arrival of the Maoris. In the South Island moas of the genus* Emeus *lingered much longer, possibly in the unexplored interior even down to the time when Capt. James Cook visited New Zealand (1769)."* (Encyclopedia Britannica)

One Tuesday in October, Miss Gold's 4th grade class went on a field trip to the Natural History Museum, a cavernous old building with stone floors and worn marble staircases that echoed. Before leaving the school, she cautioned the class to be sure to pay close attention to everything they saw at the museum, for upon their return, they would be expected to write about their visit.

"I thought I would like the museum but I thought we were supposed to be very safe, not like the zoo where there are live tigers and even the tame animals bite if you feed them, I was more scared at the museum than ever before in my life and it was very hard not to scream which would have been really embarrassing, I guess that's why I fainted, is it more embarrassing to scream or to be a person who fainted?"

Tammy Temple

"On our trip to the museum I'm now very sorry that I was ahead in the next room with Miss Gold when it happened. It's true that she was telling us all about the mammals, but I will always regret that I went with Miss Gold instead of watching what Joey was doing in the room with the Moa that we're not supposed to write about." *Susan Silber*

"Joey shouldn't of poked the M-- with his pencil. They say 'Let sleeping dogs lie' and I think this is also true for M--s. I didn't like Joey, but I wouldn't want what happened to Joey to happen to me. Besides, the sign said DON'T TOUCH."

Robbie Werner

"It really really happened, I swear to God it did, Miss Gold, I know you don't want to hear about it but it's TRUE, it DID happen, so I don't know why you won't listen to us about it. If you're going to spend all your time telling us to be truthful and then you don't believe us when we tell the truth, I don't know what use it is to be truthful because IT REALLY DID HAPPEN and THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED ON OUR TRIP TO THE MUSEUM." *Amy Lastition*

"Our visit to the museum was very nice except for one thing. For instance the mineral exhibit was very interesting and I also liked the fossil ferns and trilobites, but I did not care for the cross-section of the chicken's digestive system or for anything else in that room." *Tessa Wright*

"On our trip to the museum there COULD have been a lot of blood and guts but there weren't. If there had been blood and gory stuff all over, then SOME people might believe where Joey went. Besides, I like lots of blood, it makes it exciting."

Jimmy Pierce

"Before I went to the museum, I didn't know anything about prehistoric birds. Now I do! The Moa was very big. It was the biggest bird I have ever seen. It looked like a giant ostrich. The sign said that it wasn't real and that the last Moa died a long time ago, but I don't believe that. I think a Moa could live for a long time with no food because camels do this all the time. Moas are very big and if a Moa stood really still it might not need to eat for a long time. I bet the Moa was very hungry by now." *Danny Laskowski*

Police Blotter: "Tuesday, 2:20P.M. Miss Stephanie Gold, teacher at the Riverside Elementary School, reported one of her pupils missing after a field trip to the Natural History Museum. The boy, 9 year old Joseph Brown, has not been located.

The other animals in the museum, who were confined to glass cases, felt envious and aggrieved that the moa should do such a thing. After all, it was not even real, only a reconstruction with ostrich feathers glued all over. The anaconda, artistically coiled in a very sturdy case, was especially unhappy, and later pried up the top of his case in order to devour the night watchman.

LETTERS

TYPO'S ✷✌✳✂✹✎✏✁!!!/ Science Fiction?

Barbara Rosen 1B, Brooklyn NY 11226

Dear Jan and Marion,

I have one comment (critical, alas) and one question:

The comment is that I was astonished to find, in such a handsome publication, that there were *so many typos*. You are so careful otherwise: good paper, good art, a clear, easy-on-the-eye typeface...and then -- *slapdash proofreading*!

I think my own story hit the jackpot for the single worst typo. Right at the end, where Miss Nelson is talking with the zookeeper, the dialogue should read:

"That's me, lady."

"I've brought you a - an animal." Instead the two lines appear in one set of quotes with the "I" of "I've" left out:

"That's me lady. Ve brought you a - an animal."

I hope puzzled readers were able to sort it all out.

The question is for Marion: You describe the cover story, "Change," as "...obviously S.F." My confusion about the definition is total! My understanding of "S.F." is that the story is based on Fantasy-Science: either futuristic technology or a hypothetical other world or a never-tried experiment in human sociology. The best S.F. (in my opinion) is about ordinary people confronted with the extraordinary.

To me "Change" has no S.F. features at all. The world appears to be ours. The technology and pollution certainly are! The creature is pure myth and fantasy, however: a little like a naiad, but a naiad with (excuse the expression) bite. How is this S.F.???

I see that you're putting together a Hallowe'en issue. Does that mean you'll be reading horror? Soft horror or horrible horror? Goody! Let me know.

Dear Barbara : I called Change *science fiction because it deals with the products of technology up against a strange beast. I think you would agree that there are plenty of strange beasts around – even if we may not know them all at present. Remember only 75 years ago the gorilla was considered pure "fantasy". Anyone who believed in them was jured at. Science isn't all spaceships and robots – it can include biology. I thought* Change *was pure s-f but with flavor and feel of fantasy and that's what I like. If the language in a story is of science and technology, it's S-F. If they keep talking about highways and computers and spaceships, even if they're wizards and sorceresses, to me it's still S-F. The only thing that I absolutely refuse is the use of the word Sci-Fi in any writing I have anything to do with. Language should be accurate. Sci-Fi to me implies the media - T.V. and comics. De gustibus–*

Definately soft horror - the kind that gives you a creepy feel, <u>not</u> the kind that makes you lose your lunch. That goes for every issue, not just Hallowe'en.

Dear Barbara, I added the emphasis above, because I got what seemed like about 100 letters bringing this to my attention. Barbara, we have literally been knocking at death's door here. Marion and I just figured out today, that since the earthquake we've been in what's felt like a cyclone. From October until now- what is this August- is just one big blur. Ever optomistic, I think that we're on the road out of death and distruction. Keep your fingers crossed. And thank you and everyone who have been sending cards and their prayers. Don't stop - we need all the help we can get - believe me, we're fighting against what some times seems-insurmountable odds.

David Bradley is back by popular demand, doing among other things, the proofreading, so please give us another chance with another one of your great stories! –jlb

"No Nice Way To Put It"

Mary Anne Landers/Rima Saret, Russelville, Arkansas

Dear Jan,Allow me to comment on Parke Godwin's "No Nice Way to Put It."... Well, in my humble opinion, that part about becoming a better writer might be true, but the rest isn't necessarily so. If it were, why would formula romances constitute a good (?) half of the paperback market? Why don't we writers who've been around a while, such as myself (with thirty-eight years of actual experience behind me), and who draw on what we've learned in both a superficial and a profound sense when we create our works, get published every time we stuff a manuscript in an envelope?

Dear Mary Anne: That's the big question, It's a temptation -- even for me -- to write the same book over and over. Some readers seem to want us to, so they don't have to think -- I'm convinced romance readers just read the same book over and over. -MZB

David F. Godwin (no relation) Dallas, Texas

Dear Ms. Bradley,

Congatulations to Parke Godwin for saying things that badly need to be said-- and said often. He need not apologize.

I am old enough to remember when there were (a) writers and (b) readers. All the writers were also readers, of course - but not the other way around. Now, to judge from the letters in and editorial content of most magazines devoted to imaginative fiction, these categories no longer hold. What we have now are (a) writers and (b) aspiring writers. As a reader with no ambition to produce fiction, I find myself a member of a dying breed. I have the uneasy feeling that stories are no longer read for entertainment or enlightenment but rather as examples of "how to do it."

What's the motivation? Your name in print? No big deal. Making a living without having to work? Don't be absurd. Status? 'Tis fleeting and empty. It's not as if there were a shortage of material - any material - a yawning gap that had to be filled at all costs. The shortage is in quality, not quantity.

I pity the poor editor who has to examine ream after ream of really wretched dreck to search out that rare gem - a publishable story. However, as a reader, I find myself increasingly in the same position. Where is the worthwhile novel amond rck after rack of poorly written open-ended trilogies that appear to be nothing more than exercises in typing and/or self-indulgence?

To the "aspiring writer" who is acutally driven to write whether (s)he will or no, I would ask what is wrong with being an insurance agent, a typesetter, a social worker, an actor? Society cannot function if every literate human being becomes a writer. Maybe you're missing your true calling.

Dear David: You don't know the half of it, - reading all those trilogies and now all these stories– I feel like telling half the writers - have you given any thought to being a plumber? If everyone became a writer, who'd be left to read?!–MZB

Douglas Lent, Wareham, MA

Dear Fantasy Magazine,

Thank you for another wonderful issue, and especially Parke Godwin's editorial. To have to tell the hard truth to anyone is a particularly thankless task, but all the more necessary because of that. In my own case, he did not say anything I had not already realized about myself and am now struggling with. But being able to read about it in a complete and

articulate form from someone more experienced is a help.

I wish you all well, and await the next issue. And a special well-wish to Marion. You are a very special lady, so stay healthy! We don't have enough like you as it is. *(Isn't that the truth! And you know what - she doesn't get it, she thinks that anyone could do what she has done, no problem, they just have to work at it.–jlb)*

COVERS...

Jocelyn Kramer,Portland, OR

I'd like to comment on the cover for Issue #8. To be totally tactless: Yech. The horse and rider in the foreground are quite good, but the head in the background is really, well, grotesque. I'm sure it is meant to be, but I'd rather not be confronted with it on the cover. There. So much for picking nits.

The stories were quite good. I especially liked *Time to Diet*. My doctor just put me on a diet. I feel less grumpy about it all since I read the story. Keep up the good work!

Dear Jocelyn: We've had mixed responses to the cover -- and to "Time to Diet" and to "No Nice Way to Put It" -- We're glad you guys out there are paying attention. –MZB

Kenneth F. Slater
FANTAST (MEDWAY) LIMITED
Cambs, England

I like the cover of Issue #7 - but am not certain whether the astonished expression displayed by the turret (more or less) in the centre is deliberate. If it was, congratulations; delightful.

Sorry, it's completely accidental. We didn't even see it. Neither did the artist (George Barr). -MZB, jlb

New to Conventions...

Dinah Faber,Brewster, KS

As a newcome to the world of fantasy, I would like to know how to get info about all the fanzines, conventions, etc. that everybody seems to know about except me? I would especially like to know about the conventions, conferences, etc. where MZB might be appearing.

..."No Nice Way to Put It" by Parke Godwin was terrific! I plan to make it required reading the next time I teach a creative writing class!

Dear Dinah: Look in Locus Magazine for convention information, you should be able to find a copy in any speciality science fiction bookshop. And I hope you received the information I forwarded to you.–jlb

I'll do a publicity tour next year, God willing. MZB. And I'll post her itinerary!-jlb

Serious Scholar of Fantasy...

MeLinda Hughes , Pep, TX

Dear Ms. Bradley,

As a serious scholar of fantasy (I am working on my Ph.D. in Medieval/Renaissance Literature with a minor in Popular Culture), especially feminist fantasy, I write to you with two suggestions for *MZBFM*, which I have recently started receiving.

First, I suggest that you include scholarly articles, at least one per issue, in your magazine. I realize that your magazine is primarily a fiction magazine, but I believe it could also become a valuable tool for fantasy scholars, which would make it more marketable, while continuing to cater to readers of short fantasy fiction. For example, I believe more articles such as Darrel Schweitzer's interview with Evangeline Walton would be popular with both fans and scholars.

Wait, you are probably thinking to yourself that there are numerous scholarly journals with these types of articles for fantasy scholars, but I beg to differ. I have been working in the area of fantasy with popular, but what some would consider less than scholarly, (in other words, fantasy writers other than J.R.R.Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, William Morris, and Lewis Carroll) authors for over a year and there are very few journals that include articles on such wonderful writers as Jean Auel, Diana Paxson, Ru Emerson, Kenneth C. Flint, R.A. MacAvoy, Patricia McKillip, Keith Taylor, Stephen Lawhead and Robin McKinley, to name only a few. I even hesitate to add that there are few journals that carry articles on your own work in fantasy.

I recently enrolled in a required bibliography course. Since I am considering a topic concerning the archetypal heroine in feminist fantasy, I decided to use that topic for an assigned annotated bibliography, which required fifty entries on fifty articles and books. I attempted to locate articles on Jean Auel, Vera Chapman, Susan Cooper, Sharan Newman's *Guinevere* trilogy, Evangeline Walton, Patricia McKillip, Robin McKinley, Patricia C. Wrede, Diana Paxson and of course, your works of fantasy. I used science fiction/fantasy bibliographies, computer access to MLA, and every other means at my disposal to locate a mere fifty articles. Would you like to know my statistics?

The Mists of Avalon - 8
The Firebrand - none
The Fall of Atlantis - 2

I personally believe the problem is not a lack of interest in these works, because the bestseller's lists tell me otherwise. I believe the problem is a lack of sources for publication. At this point, let me state that I do have a self-motivated interest in my suggestion, other than needing articles about these and other contemporary authors. I write articles continuously but have few sources for publication for articles concerning only fantasy. I am working on an articles concerning heroines of *The Fall of Atlantis*, *The Mists of Avalon*, and *The Firebrand*.

My second suggestion is the inclusion of a review of fantasy books. Yes, I know that *Locus* and *Rave Reviews* include reviews and advertisements for fantasy books, but *Locus* focuses on science fiction and *Rave Reviews* does not include enough reviews of fantasy. The demise of *Fantasy Review* brought the end of serious journals reviewing works of fantasy. Why couldn't your magazine take its place? Once again, I think it would make it more marketable.

I have one futher point to add, then I will let you return to your serious work. You pay what you call "professional rates" for fiction. Since I am not a fiction writer I am not sure what professional rates are, but I am sure that they take a considerable cut from your profits. On the other hand, most scholars are willing to work simply for the glory of publication. I think this might include reviewers as well.

Dear MeLinda: If Darrell Schweitzer's interview of Evangeline Walton is an example of a scholarly article, you can count on us. We do appreciate our role as a ... and appreciate your time in...Everybody wants me to do a review column, but every magazine on the market, from Locus *to the* Texas University Quarterly, *has a review column which I never read because they're mostly about the (nonexistent) SYMBOLISM of some book, where all I want to know is, what's it about? They never tell me, so I don't read reviews and therefore don't print them.*

My co-editor wants to know if the readers really want their hands held this way. Let us know. I get the feeling that if people really want reviews, they'll find them in all the other magazines. What do you think?

As I'm fond of saying in my typically tactless way, my roommate says I treat tact as a dirty word - I deplore the attempt to treat S-F as literature - I want to be an author people read, not analyze. I can't think of much worse than being (shudder) required reading. When I was a kid, teachers would confiscate S-F magazines, burn them and tell me "not to waste my mind on this junk." A direct quote. How times change.

We don't exist to make life easy for bibliographers and librarians. Thanks, though.

Most scholars say "If a book really sells, it's no good." Look at what's on the Times Bestseller List - the best diet book and the best spy story/steamy romance. I should feel complimented? Yes, I'm tactless. -MZB

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS:

Jan van 't Ent, Netherlands

Dear Jan:

I'd like to know is how you handle continuation of subscriptions. As far as I know mine should be valid for issues 9 and 10, so maybe I'm a bit early with this; but do you send a reminder, or is

it up to me to remember in time, and in that case: what exactly is in time?

Let me conclude by stating I'm very happy with this 8th issue, and can't wait for the next (ungrateful, I know, and greedy too, but it was so good).

Dear Jan: Subscription renewals– yes, well, have you ever noticed that the first thing that happens when you subscribe to a magazine, possibly before you even get the first few issues– you get renewal form after renewal form marked: Urgent, This is Your Last Chance, etc. etc.. I can't stand it. We are not interested in adding to the "junk mail" of the world, and it seems to me that if someone is really reading the magazine and enjoying it, they will take 5 minutes to sit down, address an envelope, write a check and continue their subscription. Of course the advice I get from every other editor is "you're crazy - you must send at least 3 renewal reminders, otherwise people just won't subscribe". Well, if that's what it takes, I can't believe that they are really going to read the magazine anyway. It's our philosophy to pay attention to what you do like and get rid of what you don't.

Please don't worry - if you should miss any issues, just write me a note when you send your renewal and we'll fill ithem in for you. I have a special stash for our loyal subscribers! And Bobbe now has a big red stamp for the outside of the envelope which will alert you when your subscription has run out.

Thank you for your concern. We hope that you will be enjoying the magazine for many years to come! –jlb, MZB

"KILL DANCE"...

Susan Johnson W. Wareham, Ma.

Dear Ms. Burke:

I was pleased to receive the Winter Issue #7, and especially happy that "The Adinkra Cloth" is being considered for a Nebula award - it was a wonderful story. But if "Kill Dance" doesn't come up for consideration next time, I'll be amazed. It was one of the most memorable and original short stories I've ever read! Being a fan as well as a writer, I look forward to every issue, and the winter issue was worth the wait. Thank you very much.

Dear Susan: Thank you, we like it too! - MZB

No Cauldron Votes? Fantasy Poetry...

Cheri M. Langlois Mendocino, CA

Dear Marion & Jan,

Did I read pg. 38 correctly? No more Cauldron votes? I hope I am mistaken, I love to tell which stories touched me the most!...Do you know of a market for fantasy poetry? That's what I write. Keep up the good work.

Dear Cheri, We're just running behind. -MZB Yes, I am sorry if I gave you that impression - for the results for #7 and #8 see the contents page.

We have had several requests for information on where to get Fantasy Poetry published. As Marion and I are not equiped to handle poetry we would like to refer you to a wonder woman who might be able to help: Suzette Haden Elgin, Fantasy Poetry, P.O. Box 1137,Huntsville, AR 72740, (501) 559-2273.

TIME TO DIET – Bigotry

Mary Stanleigh, Oakland, Ca

Dear Jan and Marion:

Upon receiving my copy of the Spring issue of Fantasy Magazine, I was shocked to see that in your blurb for "Time to Diet" you totally trivialized my reason for quitting. Nowhere in my letter of resignation did I say that I thought the story was insulting to fat people. Believe me, fat people are used to being insulted. I'm sure that you, as intelligent people who deal in words professionally, must realize that insult and bigotry are not even in the same ballpark. Bigotry can lead to insults, but insult is one of the most trivial manifestations of bigotry.

Dear Mary, Well, we calls 'em as we sees 'em. I have lost over 50 pounds and it wasn't easy. I felt that everytime I sat down to eat I was being punished, all I got was rabbit food. And then I had to suffer the idiot lectures at the diet places that told me how I was now going to get more dates. I did it, but then I am diabetic -- no excuses accepted, and I am persuaded by the unpleasantness of the alternative. And if you don't think being overweight compromises your *health, ask your doctor. And that's all we have to say on* that *subject, thank you. - MZB, jlb.*

Blue Day...

Patricia Duffy Novak, Opelika, AL

Dear Ms. Bradley and Ms. Burke:

I'm sure you will get scores of responses to the letter from Judy Fitzgerald, in which she complained that Ms. Bradley wasn't giving her stories a fair reading, but I'll throw in my comments, anyway. Marion Zimmer Bradley has to be the best editor in the field for encouraging new writers. From the contributors' biographies, it is obvious that the magazine publishes an overwhelming number of first or second fiction sales. My own experience with Ms. Bradley's projects is also proof that she gives every writer a fair chance. She has purchased four of my stories, for Darkover anthologies and the magazine, and I am very much of a "beginning" writer, with no personal connections to anyone on her editorial staff. Ms. Bradley has also rejected a number of my stories, both by "form letter and by personal note, but there's a tight market for short fiction and, as an editor, she has every right to pick and choose. If I don't give her exactly what she's looking for, some other writer surely will. *(Don't I wish–MZB)*

By the way, I think your varieties of "form" rejection, in which the major problems with the story are explained, are far more helpful than the "it doesn't suit our current needs" variety. I also appreciate the short turn-around time on stories you can't use.

I'd also like to reply to Selina Rosen's letter by telling her that I really enjoyed her story "Closet Enlightenment"(issue #6). I even went back and read it again to be sure. It was still a good story, even after I knew the ending.

Dear Patricia: Thanks -- we're starting a special door to put up just these bits of appreciation for a blue day. (Hate mail will be filed in the round file)-MZB,jlb

MaryEllen Bradley,Manchester,NH

Dear Ms. Bradley & Ms. Burke,

I know you've stated one of your criteria for stories is to instill a sense of wonder in the reader. I also think the stories you have chosen for the Magazine present us with the opportunity to grow, to learn to look at other cultures, to respect those different from ourselves and to not judge others en masse but to see the individual and work with him or her. (All this in the stories you've given us -- wow! It's no wonder I love this Magazine. I learn and have fun at the same time.)

Ms. Bradley, I was sorry to hear of your illness but very glad you are on the mend. Be sure you are in my thoughts and healing circle; may you be surrounded by the Light and Healing Love, Strength and Peace.

Dear Mary Ellen: Thank you. It's a great pleasure to get a letter like this because it tells us that we're doing at least a part of what we want.–MZB Yes, thank you! Your letter is definately going on the door!! jlb

Don't Despair ...

Various articles by MZB which will be closed out from the *Friends of Darkover* are now availavle through this magazine. Step right up! Write us for a list. Attn: David Bradley, ***Fantasy Magazine,*** P.O. Box 11095, Oakland, Ca 94611-9991. (Personally, I am looking forward to reading "Why Prayer Is Not Answered" by MZB.)*–jlb*

PROBLEM...

We had an unfortunate situation– someone sent a letter that they did not intend for publication. You MUST mark any correspondence NOT FOR PUBLICATION –if you mean it for our eyes only. That goes for most magazines. Please read the masthead. Thanks.*–jlb*

I wonder, where do dreams go after you dream them? *–MZB*

CONTRIBUTORS

4 *The Dancer of Chimaera*
Diana L. Paxson

Born and raised in Southern California, Diana attended Mills College in Oakland, and, like many others who have moved to the Bay Area, when she graduated in 1964, she found herself unwilling to leave. She continued her studies in Comparative Literature at UCB and earned her M.A. During finals, she spawned an idea which was to become the Society for Creative Anachronism, and she held the first tournament in her back yard in Berkeley.

Diana has published numerous stories in magazines such as **Asimov's, Amazing,** and **Fantasy Book,** and has become a regular contributor to shared world anthologies. In 1982-83 her first novel, the duo **Lady of Light** and **Lady of Darkness** was published by Pocket Books. This was the beginning of the Westria series, now being published by TOR. Perhaps Diana is becoming best known for her historical fantasies. Her first hardcover (1988), **The White Raven,** is a retelling of the legend of Tristan and Iseult. **The Serpent's Tooth** based on the legend of King Lear, has just been turned in. And now, she is off to Germany to research her next major project, a trilogy on the Suegfried legend. She anticipates this project will take about 3 years. Concurrently she's collaborating on Fionn MacCumhal, also a trilogy, with Adrienne Martine-Barnes. We hope that she will find time again to contribute to *MZBFM*!

MZB notes – this story is very much like the s-f of the great C.L. Moore who defined science fiction in the forties. Men who think there were no women in s-f before the sixties, not only don't know what they're talking about – they don't know they're missing! Diana Paxson seems the logical successor of C.L. Moore.

11 *Greep Bouillabaisse*
Gred Costikyan

I've had short fiction published in ABORIGINAL SF and AMAZING; my first novel appears from Tor this October. I'm a professional game designer, with 23 commercially-published games to my name, including five winners of the Origins Award—the most prestigious award in the field, albeit this is not saying a great deal. I've also published non-fiction in a wide variety of markets, including NEW YORK magazine, REASON, and STRATEGY & TACTICS. At present, my "occupation" is equal parts writer, game designer, and umm, baby minder. Memberships: SFWA (Affiliate Member); Palm Springs Writers Guild; Mt. San Jacinto Natural History Association; Palm Springs Desert Museum; The Living Desert (a nature preserve).

Prior Publications: "The Lay of the Lineboat Lovers" FANTASTIC, April 1980; "Teacher" AMAZING, March 1982. Also numerous publications and patents in the fields of chemistry, rocket propellants, and environmental science.

13 *Kindred Spirits*
Dennis O. Hines

I have dabbled in writing SF & F since I was a teenager in high school, but it has only been in the past few years that I have taken the craft seriously. I was just beginning to get discouraged by my apparent lack of progress in writing, when my beautiful daughter was born right before Christmas. Only days after her birth, the creative juices began to flow and I penned this story in a burst of energy (could there have been a connection?). Even though my job as a Flight Test Engineer has had many exciting moments, the thrill of this first sale tops almost everything. The dozens of stories I've written and had rejected now seem a little less painful.

15 *John & Mary*
Frank C. Gunderloy, Jr.

General Numerical Data: Born March 9, 1931, Baltimore, Maryland. Married 35 years. Three children.

Education: Ph.D. Chemistry, Rutgers University, 1957.

Occupation: Retired aerospace and environmental scientist.

16 *A Disgruntled Blue Collar ...*
Selina Rosen

On February 7 the Shire March of Smyth Kepe made me knight's marshal. On the 9th I got my arm broken at a fighter practice.

The long and short of it is that I wound up, shall we say, losing my job at the mill, and I am now doing carpentry again which suits me fine.

I haven't done any short stories recently as I have been focusing all my attentions on trying to finish a novel, which should be ready to go to market by this fall. But when I saw the ad for the short, short issue, well I had to take the challenge. Could I write a story in which the title was as long as the story itself and here you have it.

19 *Voices*
Janet R. Rhodes

Your selection of VOICES is my third sale! My first, THE PLAGUE, is in DOMAINS OF DARKOVER (March 1990). My second sale, IF ONLY BANSHEES COULD SEE, will be in RENUNCIATES OF DARKOVER which, I gather, will be out about March 1991.

I have been writing fiction for about three years. I have worked for the Washington State Department of Ecology for about 17 years. Olympia, Washington, is home to me and my husband John. We like to hike and camp. Besides writing and working, I make pine needle baskets, read (of course), teach self-help classes for adults and assist our local "alternate dispute resolution center." Variety is the spice of life!

20 *Roadkill*
Mercedes Lackey

She's 40 years old– single, but not available. She graduated in Biology/Animal Behavior from Purdue, but has been working for the last 11 years as a computer programer for American Airlines in Tulsa. She started writing in about 1982 because she was bored. First she wrote for fan magazines to "get her material up to professional standards", which she said took her about 3 years. Then she took the plunge and her 12th book will be published in August– **Children of the Night,** a book based on her *Nightside* story that was published here in Issue #6. She gives credit to MZB and C.J. Cherryh for their detailed rejection letters, and in C.J.'s case, line by line editing.

Her theory of why there are lots of SF writers in Oaklahoma: "In 1945 R.A. Lafferty put something in the water because he was tired of being the only SF writer in Oaklahoma!"

28 *Flowers*
Kit W. Wesler

This is my first sale. I did have a poem in the *American Poetry Anthology* a few years ago, which hardly counts. I began submitting stories in high school and college, in the early '70s, but set attempted fiction-writing aside when I entered graduate school and sitting in front of a typewriter became a chore. I started submitting again just a couple of years ago, but my output is still small because my word processor is usually tied up with other things.

I live in Western Kentucky and work for Murray State University. I am an archaeologist, with research interests and field experience in several states in the U.S. and also in Nigeria. I am beginning to try to work my anthropology and archaeology background into science fiction and fantasy, and one result will probably be in my next submission. Right now I am working on assemblage pattern recognition and considering the nature of small-scale ranked societies, with obvious potential for stirring literature.

40 *Pas De Deux*
Nancy L. Pine

I was born in Massachusetts, grew up on Long Island, and now live in Kingston, New York, which is a city between the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains.
I've held a number of jobs, most of them of a temporary nature, and am now working at the local library, showing people where the card catalog is and hunting for their cards when they forget to bring theirs.
I am currently working on a high fantasy novel which, judging by my current lack of speed, should be finished somewhere around the middle of the next century.

40 *After The Dragon Is Dead*
Lawrence Watt-Evan

Lawrence Watt-Evans is the author of over a dozen novels of science fiction and fantasy, and the winner of the 1988 Hugo Award for best short story. His only previous appearance in *MZBFM* was "The Palace of al-Tir al-Abtan," in the Autumn 1989 issue. His most recent novel was a change of pace, a horror novel entitled *The Nightmare People*; coming up next year is the fourth in the Ethshar fantasy series, *The Blood of a Dragon*, and his first attempt at editing an anthology, *Newer York*. He's a full-time writer, living in Maryland with a wife, two kids, and two cats, and reports that he initially took up writing because "I liked the hours."

41 *Painted Lady*
Susan Johnson

I'm a supermarket cashier who'd rather be sailing. I've stuck to short stories and have published quite a few -many with a "weird" twist. The only one I've ever had run in a s-f/fantasy magazine, however, was published in an early issue of ROD SERLING'S THE TWILIGHT ZONE MAGAZINE. Besides cashiering and writing, what time I have left over is devoted to the comfort and happiness of two aging but beloved black cats.

Cauldron Results

Congratulations To:

Issue #7:

1st place: *Daughter of the Oak,* David M. Shea
2nd place: *Night Bound,* Cynthia Drolet
3rd place: *Heart's Desire,* Patricia Duffy Novak

Issue #8

1st place: *Son of the Sun,* Patricia Shaw Mathews
2nd place: *Change,* Jo Clayton
3rd place: *The Siren* Patrick Swenson

46 *Her Father's Daughter*
Patricia Cirone

Short stories in print: *S.A.R.* in *Sword and Sorceress III*, editor MZB; *Out of Ashes* in *Four Moons of Darkover* editor MZB; *Just Another Working Mom* in *Yankee Witches* editors Waugh, Sherry and Greenberg;*A Flower from the dust of Khedderide* in *MZBFM*, winter 1989.
Forthcoming:*Grim Calling* in *Sword and Sorceress VII*, editor MZB; *Papercut Luck* in *Catfantastic II*, editor Andre Norton; *About Time* in *Free Amazon* anthology, editor MZB. Miscellaneous: Honorable Mention, Writers of the Future Contest.

As I told Jan, I wrote the rough draft of this story on a napkin at dinner during World Con in the Fall, after meeting her and hearing about the special Short-Short Issue. This is the second time I've written a story in a restaurant—there must be something in that old coffee house routine. Too bad I can't afford to eat in them more often!

48 *Uncrossed Stars*
Nathan Long

I'm 27 and this is my first sale. I live in Hollywood, trying to make it in the screenwriting business. I've had no luck yet, but the web of contacts continues to grow and rejection is to me now like water off a duck's back. To keep body and soul together, I work as a clerk in a comic book store.
I'm a swashbuckler at heart and long for the day when swords clash and witty dialogue flashes once again on the silver screen. With luck, I'll be the one to make it happen.

49 *Mathemagics*
Patricia Duffy Novak

"Mathemagics" is my fourth fiction sale. The other three have also been to Marion Zimmer Bradley—two short stories for the last two Darkover anthologies, and "Heart's Desire" in the winter issue of *MZBFM*.
I am an assistant professor of agricultural economics at Auburn University and live in Opelika, Alabama with my husband Jim, my baby daughter Sylvia, three cats and two dogs. In the past few years, I have taken various math and physics classes for fun. "Mathemagics" was inspired by this hobby.

50 *The Balance*
Vera Nazarian

I have quit my job at Pomona College and am now working at a computer company in Marina del Rey as a customer support/ programming quality analyst.

50 *Better Sight*
Linda D. Woeltjen

My most recent publishing credits are my story in DOMAINS OF DARKOVER and one in CARMEN MIRANDA'S GHOST IS HAUNTING SPACE STATION THREE. I'd like to add a little here about the story. It's dedicated to Kelson, who was one of the first people I met at a convention. Though I met him only a few times over the years, he had a deep impact on my life, helping me to find a balance between my religious beliefs and other aspects of my life. I didn't hear of his death until many months after his passing. There was no one to mourn with, so I wrote this story instead.

32 *The Lesser Twin*
53 *Weather Witch*
Elisabeth Waters

Inspired by Madeleine L'Engle and Andre Norton , she hopes to write children's fiction. Her first novel, a young adult fantasy was awarded the 1989 Gryphon Award by Andre Norton. Published works date from 1980, many of them to MZB publications - **S&S, Free Amazons of Darkover, Red Sun of Darkover, Four Moons of Darkover, Domains of Darkover, and "Golden Vanity"** in our Premier Issue of **MZBFM. "Gunnora's Gift"** appears in **Tales of Witch World 3,** Tor 1990 (ed: Norton), and "Things That Go Grump in the Night" is part of an anthology edited by Jane Yolen.
She lives in Berkeley with MZB and is very involved with the San Francisco Opera. She has appeared as a supernumerary in numerous productions including: "La Gioconda", "Das Rheingold", and "Madama Butterfly".

54 *Moonlighting*
Douglas L Hulick

I'm currently working on a Master of Arts degree in Medieval History somewhere in New Mexico, but still consider Chicago to be home. (I actually miss the lousy weather.) When not dodging tumbleweeds and developing a taste for green chile, I try to find time to work on the numerous irons I have in the fire. Such irons include several short stories (fantasy, detective, SF, and a combination of all three), a historical article for a journal, background for a novel, and thesis research. Any bets on what (or who) goes out the window first? I'm semi-active in the SCA, depending on the time of the semester and how deep the papers have become in my room.
Moonlighting is my first professional sale. The resulting party was great.

57 *The Room with the Moa That We're Not Supposed To Talk About*
Karla Huebner

My fiction has appeared in the NORTHWEST REVIEW, COLORADO STATE REVIEW, COLLAGES AND BRICOLAGES, and a number of other places (especially FANTASY MACABRE). Currently, I've got stories forthcoming at THIN ICE and FANTASY MACABRE, though they may see print before Moa does. In a more personal vein, I'm 30 years old (is this still young enough to be encouraging to other writers?!), live on a small boat with an uninvited invisible mouse (who leaves very visible droppings), work in theater, and am also an artist and musician. My brother Todd deserves at least half the credit for this particular story, which we concocted while waiting to order dinner one evening in Prague, and the Moa which so inspired us can be seen in all its rather dusty splendor at the Narodni Muzeum there. (Yes, I do have Todd's permission to call myself the author...)

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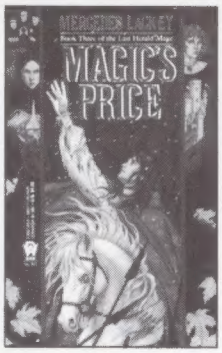

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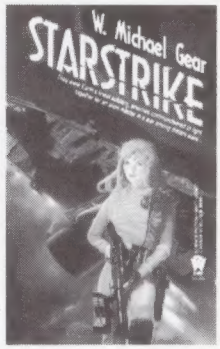

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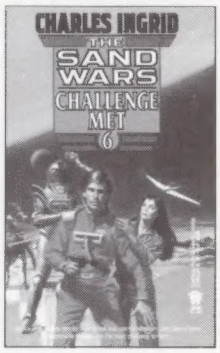

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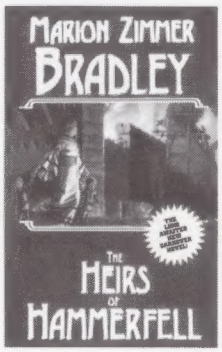

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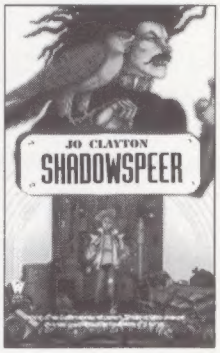

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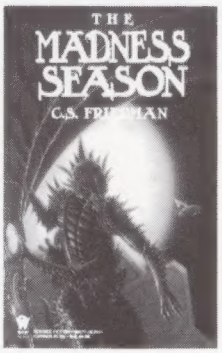

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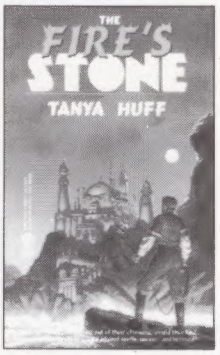

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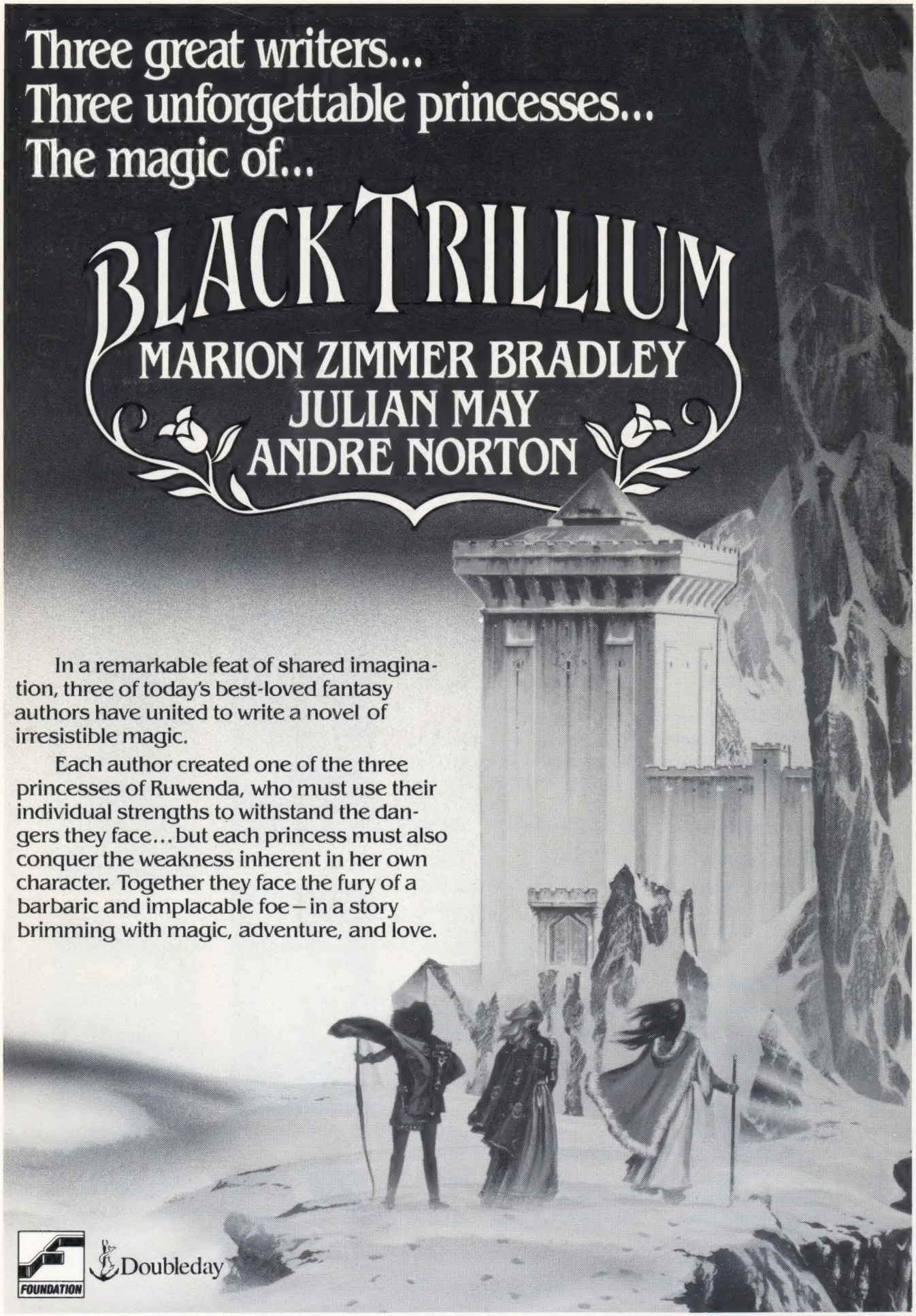

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